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A Study of the Serialization and Reception of
Bleak House

by



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ABSTRACT

In this study, I have tried to demonstrate that the contemporaneous implications and interests of *Bleak House* are better understood and appreciated when it is read in instalment form as it was originally published, and when its reviews are examined part by part as they appeared during the course of the novel's serialization from February 1852 to September 1853. I have also tried to indicate that a study of these reviews helps us to reinterpret Dickens's craftsmanship in *Bleak House*.

Critics who reviewed *Bleak House* in parts were in a disadvantageous position--they had to analyze the novel while the author's ideas were at different stages of development. But as can be seen from the study, some of the reviewers showed remarkable perception in their analytical judgments of particular parts available before them. In contrast to those who reviewed the novel after its serialization was completed, these critics concentrated on analyzing specific details of the novel's structure and social issues. Instead of commenting in a general way, as the later critics did, that Dickens exaggerated in his characterization or that his plot failed, the reviewers of the serial parts tried to point out exactly where Dickens went wrong or where he excelled.

An analysis of the novel part by part reveals that Dickens planned the structure and theme of *Bleak House*

very carefully. It becomes evident that unlike other serial writers of his time, Dickens did not have to rely on cliff-hangers or join the instalments by presenting the central character in every episode--the structure of his serial was firmly based on a complex plot. Dickens devised a unique structural pattern to achieve, on the one hand, a continuous readership interest, and on the other, a thematic unity of the whole novel. Experience taught him that he could sustain the interest of his readers successfully by intensifying the action of the novel in each quarter of its serial structure--in Numbers V and XV, and by concentrating heavily in the middle numbers. The structure was so carefully organized that though in certain numbers the reader might feel the narrative to be dull, the dullness was never allowed to continue indefinitely to precipitate a situation such as had occurred with *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

PREFACE

In the present study, I have attempted a historical and technical analysis of *Bleak House* on the basis of a survey of the hitherto unexamined reviews of the serial parts of the novel. The study originated when I had an opportunity to visit England for a year in 1973-74 on a British Council Scholarship. A chance discovery of some contemporary comments in the *Critic* and the *Morning Chronicle* on the characterization of Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House* intrigued me so much that I thought it worthwhile to go through all the available British newspapers and periodicals for the period from June 1851 to December 1853 for any possible mention, notice or review of the novel during the progress of its serialization. The present thesis is the result of my examination of this material I had collected in England.

I should like to mention here that it was while working on this thesis that I realized how useful and valuable computer technology could be in research and scholarship of this kind. The need for the application of this modern technology to literature eventually prompted me to establish LITIR (Literary Information and Retrieval), a computer database which is currently engaged in storing a variety of information on the Victorian period, and which can be used by scholars for researches in the field.

Of all those who have given me encouragement during the progress of this thesis, I must mention the following for special thanks: Professor Norman Page, who recognized the merit of this study and agreed to supervise it; Professor Philip Collins, who provided the original impetus for the research during my stay in England; Professor R.D. McMaster and Professor David Jackel, who have helped me with useful suggestions at every stage of research. I am also thankful to Professors Richard J. Dunn, John R. Wilson, A.N. Kaul, Muriel Whitaker, L.W. Conolly, R.F. Anderson, R.F. Ayling, Juliet McMaster, and Andre Nitecki for their advice and encouragement.

Special thanks are due to the British Council for its scholarship which made possible a year of study in England. I am grateful for the opportunity to examine materials at the Newspaper Library at Colindale, the British Library, Leicester University Library, and Birmingham Public Library. I wish to thank the staff of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for helping me in examining the original manuscripts and corrected proofs of *Bleak House*.

To my wife, Nandini, I am thankful for helping me with computer-typing and editing the thesis.

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. The Opening Number	36
III. Numbers Two Through Seven	65
IV. The Middle Numbers	109
V. Numbers Thirteen Through Eighteen	132
VI. The Double Number	153
VII. Conclusion	178
Bibliography	184
Appendix	197

I. Introduction

I

Serial publication originated in England in the middle of the eighteenth-century. It was, however, Dickens who turned this convention into a most popular, readily acceptable and convenient form. The Victorian mode of serialization required, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, that "the novel should be written, as well as read, in instalments, month by month."¹ Following Dickens's success in the 1830s, nearly all authors between 1840 and 1860 published their novels first in the serial form.²

¹Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp.36-37. For a full discussion, see Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 45-74; and Lance Schachtlerle, "Oliver Twist and Its Serial Predecessors," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 4(1974), 1-13.

²See Graham Pollard, "Novels in Newspapers: Some Unpublished Letters of Captain Mayne Reid," *Review of English Studies*, 18(1942), 72-73. Among other methods of publishing novels in the Victorian period, the commonest was the three-volume form offered at a guinea and a half for the set of three. Less common was the two-volume form at eighteen shillings for the two. Publication in one volume was rare, and was adopted in the case of cheap reprint. Dickens's novels were issued in single volumes when their serialization ended; the sales of the monthly numbers must have compensated the costs. The appearance of the shilling magazine in the 1860s gradually drove out the monthly magazine. However, Dickens was not affected by this method. See Tillotson, pp.20-32.

One convention led to another. While the authors wrote in parts and the publishers published in instalments, the critics found it necessary to write reviews of serial novels every month or week. As the critic of *The Atlas* remarked, "Periodical publication invites periodical criticism. One bit-by-bit system gives rise to another bit-by-bit system."³ Criticism of a novel of which only a part had been published might be "premature." A reviewer could not be expected to do justice to an author whose ideas were only partially developed. But

even in these cases, we think, however, that the critic may profitably and fairly find some matter to work on. No doubt, in laying down positions and promulgating views, he must be doubly careful. To a great extent, he is groping in the dark, and heedless movement may injure either himself or the objects with which he is dealing. But with proper precautions and proper reservations, the critical process, even under these disadvantages and impediments, may still be legitimately applied, analytically rather than synthetically, and viewing the details already set forth, rather than attempting to guess at what will be the tone

³*The Atlas*, 3 April 1852, p.219.

and calibre of the finished work.⁴

In the 1850s, first *The Spectator* and *The Athenaeum*, and then a score of weekly and daily newspapers began to publish a regular review section of current works of which the serial novels formed the major part.⁵ Though their influence was not equal to that of *The Edinburgh Review* or *The Quarterly Review*, nonetheless, it was these weekly reviews that the contemporaries read to find out what was new in the literary world.

Some attention has already been paid to Dickens's serial publication in the context of contemporary reviews. With John Butt as a joint author, Tillotson herself examines very closely, in *Dickens at Work*, how Dickens gradually adapted his genius to the demands of writing in instalments for serial publications. Butt and Tillotson also try to point out in their study Dickens's "journalistic response to events of the day . . . a response which is more varied and more extensive than is usually recognized or than we have had full opportunity of showing."⁶ In *Dickens and His Readers*, George H. Ford presents an extensive study of the reception of Dickens's novels from the Victorian

⁴*The Atlas*, 3 April 1852, p.219.

⁵See J.D. Jump, "Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen Fifties," *Review of English Studies*, 24(1948), 42-57 and "Weekly Reviewing in Eighteen-Sixties," *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 3(1952), 244-62.

⁶John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work*, (London: Methuen, 1957) p.8.

period to the present. In an appendix Ford collects thirty-four sources of reviews and notices to which Dickens either definitely or possibly responded in his works. He observes: "By exposing a few outcroppings of the vein we become aware that it must have been a more extensive one than has hitherto been supposed."⁷

Following Ford's study, Donald Howard Ericksen concentrates, in his "Dickens and the Critics of *Bleak House*, 1851-1965: A Study in Depth," on the reviews of a single novel, and provides a critical history of *Bleak House* from 1851 to 1965.⁸

None of these critics, however, examines the question whether reviews and criticisms during the progress of the monthly or weekly parts of a novel had any effect on Dickens's technique of serialization.⁹ So far, there has been only one such study, "*David Copperfield* and Its Reviewers," where Jerry Don Van examines the monthly parts of *David Copperfield* in

⁷George H. Ford, *Dickens and His Readers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), p.263.

⁸Donald Howard Ericksen, "Dickens and the Critics of *Bleak House*, 1851-1965: A Study in Depth," Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 1967. Some other studies are Archibald C. Coolidge, Jr., *Charles Dickens as a Serial Novelist* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967); Lance Schachtlerle, "Charles Dickens and the Techniques of the Serial Novel," Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1970; and "*Bleak House* as a Serial Novel," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 1(1970), 212-24; *Oliver Twist* and Its Serial Predecessors," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 4(1974), 1-13.

⁹Butt, Tillotson and Ford offer some valuable comments, but they are primarily concerned with other aspects of serial writing.

relation to their monthly reviews. Although Don Van notes "the high incidence of Dickens's modifications which corresponded to the criticism of the reviewers," his study, as the title suggests, is mainly a survey of the criticism of *David Copperfield* during the period of its serialization.¹⁰ The purpose of my thesis is not only to make a survey of the hitherto unexamined monthly reviews of the serial parts of *Bleak House*, but also to demonstrate their relevance to an analysis of the novel in its historical and technical perspectives.

II

Dickens rediscovered the serial form when the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall engaged him to write texts for Robert Seymour's sporting plates for *Pickwick Papers*. As he recalls in his 1847 Preface to *Pickwick Papers*, he was asked to write

something that should be published in shilling numbers--then only known to me, or, I believe, to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used to be carried about the country by pedlars and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears before I had served my apprenticeship to Life.

¹⁰Jerry Don Van, "*David Copperfield* and the Reviewers," Diss. Texas Technological College, 1967.

During the 1830s, the success of *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* determined for Dickens for the rest of his life, as far as the monthly form was concerned, the 'character', 'extent', date of delivery of each instalment, and even the date of payment to him by the publishers. In subsequent years, all his monthly serials consisted of nineteen instalments, the last being a double number. Each instalment, excepting the last one, consisted of thirty-two pages and two illustrations. The last double number had forty-eight pages, four illustrations, a table of contents, and a preface. The publishers generally insisted on delivery of the manuscript by the fifteenth of each month. Dickens's practice was to aim at the twentieth.¹¹

The advantages of the serial form from the business point of view can be understood from what Harriet Martineau says about an offer made to her in 1838. Her first novel, *Deerbrook*, had been published in the old three volume form and "had a larger circulation than novels usually obtain." After this, the famous publisher, John Murray, advised her to write another novel and said (as she recalled) that

he could help me to a boundless fortune, and a mighty future fame, if I could adopt his advice . . . He desired to publish this novel

¹¹Butt and Tillotson, pp.16-17.

in monthly numbers; and was willing to pledge his reputation for experience on our obtaining a circulation as large as had ever been known. It would give him high satisfaction, he declared, to see my writing on thousands of tables from which my name would exclude everything I published under it: and he should enjoy being the means of my obtaining such fortune, and such an ultimate fame as I might confidently reckon on, if I would accept his offer.¹²

Miss Martineau's personal objection to the serial form of publication led her to refuse this offer. But the passage indicates the contemporary trend and the popularity of the form in the years immediately following the success of *Pickwick Papers*.

Monthly serialization promised "a boundless fortune and a mighty future fame" to the authors. In all that Dickens did, he never lost sight of the importance of these two things in life, 'fortune' and 'fame.' He was ever conscious to safeguard not only the

¹²Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, London: Smith, Elder, 1877), II, 116-17. Dickens was acquainted with John Murray. See *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, 316 & n. Hereafter cited as *Pilgrim*.

immediate but also a steady future income.¹³ Initially Dickens was more concerned with settling down in life, and serialization ensured a fixed regular income for more than one year at a time. It also suited his original habit of writing piecemeal for the *Sketches* and *Pickwick Papers*. By the time he had completed *Nicholas Nickleby* he had established himself as a professional writer, and serialization had become a practice with him. More important, serialization helped to create a warm feeling between the author and his readers which Dickens craved for so much. In preface after preface he acknowledged the "unbounded warmth and earnestness of their sympathy in every stage of the journey we have just concluded."¹⁴ The public response was no less intimate. "I well recall," says Percy Fitzgerald in his *Memories of Charles Dickens*, "when his more exciting stories were coming out in this detached shape, such as *Dombey*, when the libraries actually hired out their copies, and when you saw the green covers in everybody's hand, for all were enchanted with it. Every line of the number was devoured; and witty strokes, then quite novel, got by

¹³One very important reason of Dickens's starting *Household Words* was that it "will become a good property." See *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter, 3 Vols. (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch, 1938), II, 213, 12 April 1850. Hereafter cited as *Nonesuch*.
¹⁴1847 Preface to *Dombey and Son*.

heart and quoted. . . ." ¹⁵

Serialization also helped Dickens to determine the likes and dislikes of his audience and to effect changes when sales fluctuated. He first experienced this advantage when the introduction of the character of Sam Weller helped him to popularize *Pickwick Papers* and consequently raise its sales enormously. In 1840 Dickens started *Master Humphrey's Clock*, and in expectation of an interesting tale and unaware of its miscellaneous contents, more than 60,000 subscribed to the first number even before its publication. But the sales dropped so considerably after the second number that Dickens was compelled to change his plan. His original intention was to write a rambling series of sketches like *The Spectators* and *The Athenaeum*; but now he changed the format and introduced within the same monthly magazine two serial novels, one after another, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*. He admitted in the 1848 Preface to *The Old Curiosity Shop* how uneasy he felt at the "desultory character" of the original series. He said:

I believe, my readers had thoroughly participated in the feeling. The commencement of a story was a great satisfaction to me, and I had reason to believe that my readers

¹⁵Percy Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens* (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith, 1913), pp.162-64.

participated in this feeling too.¹⁶

It is quite well known how the readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* became increasingly apprehensive over Little Nell's fate when the novel was appearing in serial form. "I am inundated with imploring letters recommending poor Little Nell to mercy," Dickens wrote in his letter.¹⁷

Dickens was much agitated by the poor sales of the next novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*. When he reached its third number, he decided to modify the work; he "drew up the plan of 'old Martin's plot to degrade and punish Pecksniff'." In the fourth number young Martin announced that he would go to America, a "resolve, which Dickens adopted as suddenly as his hero" to "increase the number of his readers." After the seventh number it occurred to Dickens that he should make use of the remarkable character of Mrs. Gamp and "make a mark with her." The sales did not improve, but it was from this uncertain circulation that the immortal Mrs. Gamp was born, about whom Forster rightly prophesied, "Age will not wither this one, nor custom stale her variety."¹⁸

While writing *David Copperfield* Dickens was "shocked at discovering the pain he had given" to a

¹⁶1848 Preface to *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

¹⁷See John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, notes by A.J. Hoppe (London: J.M. Dent, 1966), I, 116-18.

¹⁸Forster, I, 273-74, 277, 297.

neighbour, Mrs. Hill, who took exception to the portrayal of her character in the person of Mrs. Mowcher. Dickens immediately assured her that "his characters being made up out of many people, were composite and never individuals," but, nevertheless, "he would, whatever the risk or inconvenience, change it all, so that nothing but an agreeable impression should be left." As a result, we find the Mrs. Mowcher of Chapter 32 quite different from the one that appears in Chapter 22.¹⁹

The form of publication and the temperament of the novelist suited each other perfectly. Serialization remained one of Dicken's most effective means of maintaining an affectionate relationship with his public.

III

But critics who cared for artistic unity in fiction were not very happy with this form of publication. When the novel was not only published but also written in fragmentary form, the writer was bound to be tempted to

amplify trifling incident, and to swell sentences with any sort of words that would occupy space. The very spirit of penny-a-liner, for instance, breaks out in the prolix

descriptions of the various walks through the

¹⁹Forster, II, 99.

streets of London, every turn in which is enumerated the accuracy of a cabman. *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* are stuffed with passages that led to nothing, merely to fill the necessary room.

This was the pronouncement of a critic in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1840.²⁰ According to a literary historian at this time, the necessity to supply something "spiced and intensely interesting" in each monthly or weekly instalment made the writer forgetful of "that gradation, that proportion, which is as necessary to the due effect of a novel as of a picture or as of a work of architecture."²¹

Harriet Martineau objected to serialization of her novels on account of another artistic disadvantage. A work of art cannot be satisfactory, she thought, if it is "cut up into portions of an arbitrary length." To close each instalment effectively at a certain point, and to continue doing this successively month after month, is to spoil the writing.²² Trollope, who was in favour of serialization of his novels, but who would not allow publication until he had completed the whole novel, held a similar view and added further that another disadvantage of this method was the author's

²⁰*Fraser's Magazine*, April 1840, p.400.

²¹Thomas B. Shaw, *Outline of English Literature* (1849), p.486.

²²Martineau, II, 177.

inability to revise what he has written and published.²³ Fortunately for Dickens, however, he had an "insuperable aversion" to revising what he had already written.²⁴ However, as Mrs. Tillotson demonstrates, Dickens did revise *Sketches by Boz* heavily. As far as *Bleak House* is concerned, he had hardly any time to revise, even if he wanted to, since he could finish writing an instalment just before sending it to the printer. As I have discussed it elsewhere, an examination of the manuscripts and the page proofs reveal that the only revisions he made were to either delete or add lines or passages, not for any artistic reasons, but to help the printer with matter for exactly thirty-two pages of an instalment.²⁵

Dickens himself was faced with another difficulty when he allowed one of the early instalments to reach a climax. This happened after the death of Paul in *Dombey and Son*. When Lord Francis Jeffrey asked him, "After reaching this climax in the fifth number, what are you to do with the fifteen that are to follow?" Dickens noted in the plan for Number VI: "Great point of the Number to throw the interest of Paul, AT ONCE ON

²³Anthony Trollope, *Autobiography*, ed. Michael Sadleir (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p.127.

²⁴*Nonesuch*, II, 113, 4 August 1848.

²⁵See also Tillotson, pp.43-59; Duane DeVries "The *Bleak House* Page Proofs: More Shavings From Dickens's Workshop," *Dickensian*, 66(1970), 3-7.

FLORENCE."²⁶ And to Forster he wrote: "To transfer to Florence, instantly, all the previous interest, is what I am aiming at. For that, all sorts of other points must be thrown aside in this number."²⁷

No one was more aware of all the disadvantages of serialization than Dickens himself. He had virtually gone through all kinds of experiences accompanying this method of publication, and in course of time established himself as the greatest novelist England has ever seen. While completing *Pickwick Papers* Dickens became conscious of the particular demands of serialization and of what disadvantages it could push him. He said in his first 1837 Preface to the novel:

it was necessary--or it appeared so to the author--that every number should be to a certain extent, complete in itself, and yet that the whole twenty numbers when collected, should form one tolerably harmonious whole, each leading to the other by a gentle and not unnatural progress of adventure.

It is obvious that in a work published with a view to such considerations, no artfully interwoven or ingeniously complicated plot can with reason be expected.

²⁶Lord Francis Jeffrey's letter of 31 January 1847 to Dickens, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, ed. Lord Cockburn (1852), II, 417. This and the Number-plan for *Dombey and Son* are quoted in Tillotson, p.101.

²⁷Forster, II, 32.

Looking back to this Preface after ten years when he had already written seven novels, Dickens observes: "Although, on one of these points, experience and study have since taught me something, and I could perhaps wish now, that these chapters were strung together on a stronger thread of general interest, still, what they are, they were designed to be."²⁸ It is true that in his earlier novels Dickens wrote with less planning than is required and cared more to meet the exigencies of fragmentary publication. But he was also learning to cope with the obstacles; his 1844 Preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* is evidence of his concern for a total unity of structure towards which he was striving. He says:

I have endeavoured in the progress of this Tale, to resist the temptation of the current Monthly Number, and to keep a steadier eye upon the general purpose and design. With this object in view, I have put a strong constraint upon myself from time to time, in many places; and I hope the story is the better for it, now.

What Dickens had learnt through the years, he himself narrated in the Postscript to *Our Mutual Friend* (1865):

To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at

²⁸ 1847 Preface to *Pickwick Papers*.

once, the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design. Its difficulty was much enhanced by the mode of publication; for, it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them, perceive the relation of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver of his loom. Yet, that I hold the advantages of the mode of publication to outweigh its disadvantages, may be easily believed of one who revived it in the *Pickwick Papers* after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since.

Dickens's Prefaces, letters, and his editorial instructions, when he became the "Conductor" of his own periodicals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, also show how concerned he was both for the artistic unity of each instalment and the structural unity of the work as a whole. To achieve this purpose he devoted considerable time to thinking and planning how to arrange characters and incidents to make each instalment effective. As an editor he had to alter, re-arrange and rewrite, among other contributions, many serial stories and fictions. In 1852 alone, Dickens and his editorial staff had to read "nine hundred

manuscripts, of which eleven were available for this journal *Household Words*, after being entirely re-written."²⁹

By the 1850s Dickens had accomplished this serial art so perfectly that Percy Fitzgerald calls him a "'great exploiter' of the 'monthly part' system, which he worked up with amazing skill and even science."³⁰ The letters in connection with Mrs. Gaskell's novel, *North and South*, which was serialized in *Household Words* from 2 September 1854 to 27 January 1855, are full of remarks and suggestions on the art of serialization. Dickens approved of Mrs. Gaskell's admirable opening of the novel: it was "full of character and power" and a "suspended interest at the end." But he was worried about "the divisions into which it must fall" with reference to the "weekly space available for the purpose in *Household Words*." He, therefore, indicated in detail how each instalment should end to rouse some questions in the reader about a certain character or incident, but leaving the questions unanswered. Then he pointed out that the number should be divided into two chapters, and suggested that two of the numbers, where there was a long dialogue and scene of murder, should be fused into one to make the "difficult and dangerous subject" most

²⁹See [Charles Dickens and Henry Morley], "H.W.", *Household Words*, 16 April 1853, pp.145-49.

³⁰Fitzgerald, p.162.

effective. Finally he wrote to her:

I do not apologise to you for laying so much stress on the necessity of its dividing well, because I am bound to put before you my perfect conviction that if it did not, the story would be wasted--would miss its effect as it went on--and would not recover it when published complete. The last consideration is strong with me, because it is based on my long comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the periodical form of appearance.³¹

But Mrs. Gaskell did not like Dickens's editorial interference and would not always make the alterations suggested. Consequently, *North and South* failed to attract readers, and the sales of *Household Words* dropped considerably during its serialization. Dickens was not surprised, and said, "Mrs. Gaskell's story, so divided, is wearisome in the last degree. It would have scant attraction enough . . . thus wire-drawn it is a dreary business."³²

IV

Dickens gradually formed the habit of jotting down notes to plan his work before writing. These plans have been discussed in detail by Butt and Tillotson in

³¹*Nonesuch*, II, 561-62.

³²*Nonesuch*, II, 598.

Dickens at Work. Number-plans attached to those manuscripts available in the Forster Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum provide a glimpse of how Dickens achieved mastery of serial technique.³³ It is now evident that from *Dombey and Son* onward Dickens took particular care to form beforehand in his mind a rough outline of the novel and to be somewhat precise about the chapter and contents of a few numbers in advance before commencing his story. Forster provides us with Dickens's own version of a general outline of *Dombey and Son* and *Edwin Drood*, and it is possible that such an overall shape existed for some more novels also.³⁴ As he was writing *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote to Forster, "I feel, thank God, quite confident in the story. I have a move in it ready for this month; another for next; and another for the next."³⁵

Dickens had been busy forming a mental outline of *Bleak House* months ahead of actual writing. He made the first reference to the "shadows of a new story hovering in a ghostly way about me" in a letter to Mary Boyle on 21 February 1851, almost a year before submitting the

³³With the exception of *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens wrote Number-plans for every novel after *Martin Chuzzlewit*. MSS for these novels, except for *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, are available in the Forster Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. For further discussions on Number-plans, see Butt and Tillotson, pp.24-34.

³⁴See Forster, II, 20-23 and 366.

³⁵*Nonesuch*, II, 218. It is misdated in this edition; see Butt and Tillotson, p.124 & n.

first instalment of manuscript to his publishers.³⁶ In August of the same year he paused "between whiles to think of a new story, and as it begins to grow, such a torment of a desire to be anywhere but where I am; and to be going I don't know where, I don't know why; takes hold of me, that it is like being driven away."³⁷ He spoke of the same "symptoms and disorder" to Miss Coutts while "pondering afar off, a new book."³⁸ On 28 September he was "in the first throes of a new book, and am spasmodically altering a new house besides,--and . . . endeavouring to think of both sets of distraction to some practical end. . . ."³⁹ During the first week of October the new story was "whirling" in his mind and he started feeling a wild restlessness as he could not begin to write his "new book--having all my notions of order turned completely topsyturvy" by the workmen who came to repair Tavistock House.⁴⁰ He could not start writing *Bleak House* until the end of November;⁴¹ but it may not be wrong to surmise from his repeated reference to the proposed novel in the letters mentioned above that he had formed a definite plan of the novel before writing finally to F.M. Evans, his publisher, on 16

³⁶Nonesuch, II, 274.

³⁷Nonesuch, II, 340.

³⁸*Letters From Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 1841-1865*, ed. Edgar Johnson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p.184, 17 August 1851. Hereafter cited as Johnson.

³⁹Nonesuch, II, 346.

⁴⁰Nonesuch, II, 349, 7 October 1851.

⁴¹Forster, II, 113.

October 1851, urging him to advertise the "new serial work" "as widely as possible."⁴²

The Number-plans for *Bleak House* reveal with what care and thoughtful imagination Dickens had planned each instalment, both individually and as unit of an overall structure.⁴³ He intended to hold the attention of his readers from the very first instalment introducing two topics of contemporary interest--the Chancery evil and Mrs. Jellyby's telescopic philanthropy. In the 1850s there was a craze for fictional accounts of the world of fashion, of lords and ladies. The common reader got a peep into this world in the second chapter, "In Fashion." The average reader wanted romance and excitement. Richard, Ada and Caddy Jellyby pointed toward this possibility. To enjoy wide popularity and circulation, the story must promise mystery and suspense. Dickens had thought of these elements and noted under Chapter 3: "Law Writer. Work up from this moment/ A Progress/ Esther Summerson/ Lady Dedlock's child." Similarly, in the plans for subsequent numbers there was provision for at least one chapter in each instalment to create interest in the serial readers. In Chapter 5 of Number II, he had to "Introduce the old marine store Dealer who has the papers." "Nemo? Yes" in the plan for Number III was to -----

⁴²*Nonesuch*, II, 352.

⁴³Original MS. *Bleak House*, Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Press-Mark 47.A.28. 4 Vols.

provide Chapter 10 on "The Law Writer." The climax of Lady Dedlock discovering her child in Esther Summerson was to go on mounting until Number IX. In the plan for this number, he wrote under Chapter 19: "Mr. Guppy waits on Lady Dedlock. She finds that Esther is her child." But Dickens did not allow climactic point in this or the next number. Instead, he provided tension with Esther's contracting small-pox from Jo. In Number XI the interest was diverted to the Inquest scene, and in the Number-plan he noted: "The Court, under the excitement." Esther's "interview with her mother" led the story to some kind of high interest. So in the next number the suspense must be diverted to another channel and the entry was: "Finds that Mr. Tulkinghorn has discovered her secret? Yes." From this number onward the interest was to be sustained by Lady Dedlock's encounter with Tulkinghorn (Number XIII), Jo and Mr. Bucket (Number XIV), Tulkinghorn's murder (Number XV), mystery surrounding the actual murderer (Number XVI), Lady Dedlock's flight (Number XVII), Mr. Bucket's pursuit (Number XVIII), and the denouement in the last double number.

V

In the 1850s, when *Bleak House* was serialized, England was going through a rapid spread of education and a consequent expansion in number of the reading public;

this led to an enormous increase in the publication of books, periodicals and newspapers. This was almost baffling to an average man and left him wondering what to read and what to reject. For guidance, therefore, he turned to periodical and newspaper reviews. The dependence of the common reader on the views expressed by the periodicals and newspapers of the time is best described by Newman in his sermon, "Christ Upon the Waters" (1850):

Most men in this country like opinions to be brought to them, rather than to be at the pains to go out and seek for them. . . . Hence the extreme influence of periodical publications at this day, quarterly, monthly, or daily; these teach the multitude of men what to think and what to say.⁴⁴

The contemporary reviews, therefore, to a large extent help us to ascertain how the Victorian readers reacted to a new work of art, what they thought about it, and how they received it.

By 1850 Dickens had attained a wide popularity among the reading public. His serials and other works were noticed in newspapers and periodicals as soon as they were published. The first number of *Bleak House*

⁴⁴ John Henry Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (1898), pp.148-149, quoted in Walter H. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p.104.

appeared on 27 February 1852. The reputation of *David Copperfield* helped to create a favourable response for the new novel and as soon as it was announced there was speculation about its plot and characters. A gossip columnist in *The Critic* of 16 February 1852 went to the extent of even offering a possible outline:

Bleak House, situated on the sea-coast of an eastern country--Hero the eldest son of a decayed squire, who, thanks to the Law of Entail, can't improve his estate or free himself from debt, is doomed to take to dissipating, finally breaking his neck in a fox-hunt--Hero's little sisters have a charming governess--such eyes--such heavenly deportment--one of Dickens's sweetest creations--Hero desperately in love with her.--But then a young lady heiress of adjoining estate, very plain, common-place, but very rich, might save father from ruin--intense struggle--Hero finally departs, convinced of the necessity of an abolition of the law of entail and of a system of national education for the degraded peasantry on the east coast, who never heard of Household Words.--With strongly liberal views, comes to London to push his fortunes--engaged as a contributor to a leading journal, and embarks in a movement with

Mr. Cobweb and Friend Brute, the eminent agitators succeeds, dines with the Prime Minister, and ends by being invited into the Cabinet, and marrying the Governess. Some pathetic and comic minor characters of great force are introduced--a faithful ploughboy, who will accompany his young master to London, and whose metamorphosis into a man is more surprising than Smike's;--Then a Tractarian curate, the hero's rival for the affections of the governess, so admirably drawn! He marries the young lady of the adjoining estate, who turns out after marriage, to be no heiress at all.

The writer here at least anticipated, though with sarcasm, that the new novel would be involved with Law and a governess heroine. This outline also tells us about the popular reading taste of the time and what the reader expected from Dickens in particular: Some current social topic like "the Law," some kind of national "movement," governesses, dissipated young man, love and romance, "some pathetic minor characters of great force," and a stately lady who turns out after marriage to be different.

The first number of *Bleak House* was noticed in

most of the daily, weekly and fortnightly newspapers.⁴⁵ The subsequent monthly numbers were reviewed regularly in *Bell's Life in London*, *Bell's New Weekly Magazine*, *The Weekly Dispatch*, *The Magnet*, *The News of the World*, *The Weekly News and Chronicle*; irregularly in *The Morning Advertiser*, *The Morning Chronicle*, *The Atlas*, *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*; there was a series of articles in *The Standard* criticizing Dickens for his attack on Foreign Missions and in *The Leader* questioning the feasibility of death by Spontaneous Combustion. When completed in September 1853 the novel was reviewed widely in all the important daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, and quarterly newspapers and periodicals.

A close look at the the circulation (see next page) of some of the newspapers and periodicals I have discussed will indicate that they must have covered the entire mass of public that read Dickens's novels in the 1850s.

⁴⁵A case which was in proceeding in the Court of Exchequer in November-December 1852 to decide whether Dickens's *Household Narrative* should pay stamp duty or not led to a definition of a newspaper. It was decided that any publication that appeared at intervals of less than twenty six days was to be called a newspaper. See *The Morning Advertiser*, 7 December 1852.

***Title	Price	Estimated circulation	Type of readership
<i>The Morning Advertiser</i> (daily)	5d	67,000	Lower to middle class
<i>The News of the World</i> (weekly)		110,000	Lower to middle class
<i>The Weekly Dispatch</i> (weekly)	6d	50,000	Lower and lower-middle class
<i>The Critic</i> (Fortnightly)	6d	17,000	Upper middle and educated class
<i>The Examiner</i> (weekly)	6d	49,000	Upper middle and educated class
<i>The Athenaeum</i> (weekly)	4d	20,000	Almost indispensable among literary and scientific men

***This table is based on Alver Ellegård's "The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain: II. Directory," reprinted in *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 4 (1971), 3.

One interesting aspect of book-reviewing in the 1850s was anonymity. It was customary in those days not to sign an article, because it was argued that "an anonymous article carries a force which it could not possibly attain except in very special cases, if it were signed." There was, however, controversy about this practice and signed articles began to appear in *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859), *The Fortnightly Review* (1865), *The Contemporary Review* (1866) and *The Nineteenth Century* (1877).⁴⁶ Sometimes the writer himself revealed his identity by republishing under his name articles and reviews that had appeared anonymously earlier. The essays Lord Denman published in his pamphlet, "Uncle Tom's Cabin, *Bleak House*, Slavery and Slave Trade" had originally appeared as reviews and editorial articles in *The Standard* a few months before the publication of the pamphlet. In the chapter on Dickens in his book, *The Newspaper Press* (1871), James Grant incorporated an article that had appeared in *The Morning Advertiser*.⁴⁷ John Forster revealed his authorship of several reviews of Dickens's works in *The Examiner* by using them extensively in his *Life of Charles Dickens* (1871-1872).⁴⁸

⁴⁶Walter Houghton, "Introduction," *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals: 1824-1900*, I (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p.xviii.

⁴⁷*The Morning Advertiser*, 13 June 1870.

⁴⁸Philip Collins, "Dickens's Self-Estimate: Some New Evidence," in *Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation*, ed. Robert B. Partlow (Carbondale,

Another aspect of book-reviewing which to my knowledge, has not been studied was the practice of authors' writing notes about their own works for reviewers. In her *Autobiography*, Harriet Martineau narrates how greatly she was surprised when her publisher "inquired when I should like to come to their back parlour, 'and write the notes', -- 'What notes?' -- 'The notes for the Reviews, you know, Ma'am.' He was surprised at being asked to explain that authors write notes to friends and acquaintances connected with periodicals, 'to request favourable notices of the work.' 'I assure you, Ma'am . . . all our authors do it . . . it is the universal practice, I believe.'" ⁴⁹

Another example is in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*. The novel begins with Lady Carbury writing such letters to three editors about the reviews for her latest potboiler. ⁵⁰

I doubt whether Dickens had to resort to this practice. ⁵¹ At the beginning he was lucky to have received favourable attention from persons like George Hogarth. Later, besides John Forster, he had a host of friends who were either proprietors, editors or

⁴⁸(cont'd) Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp.21-43.

⁴⁹Martineau II, 101.

⁵⁰Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.1-3.

⁵¹There is some possibility, however, that the earliest reviews which Dickens mentions in the letters quoted in the following pages may have been written by friends at his persuasion.

influential journalists. The reviews they wrote, even if critical, were not generally hostile. Still later, from 1850 onward, Dickens cared very little for reviews.⁵² However, Philip Collins has speculated on Dickens's share in the reviews Forster wrote for the *Examiner* and in view of Forster's intimate knowledge of Dickens's writing and thoughts, it is possible that Forster's reviews reflected Dickens's viewpoints.⁵³

How did Dickens react to the reviews of his works? His prefaces and letters indicate that he was very sensitive to his reviewers. According to Philip Collins, Forster knew "how easily Dickens was upset by adverse criticism" and therefore "took care not to disturb their friendship by saying anything in his reviews of the novels and stories from which Dickens would much dissent."⁵⁴ In a letter Dickens wrote to D.M. Moir, on 19 May 1843, he admitted that he "suffered intensely from reading reviews."⁵⁵

In the same letter, Dickens expressed a kind of resolve, a "solemn compact" with himself, that he would not read reviews of his books but "know them for the

⁵²But the date of the publication of the first number of *Bleak House* on 27 February 1852, a day earlier than the Magazine Day (the last day of the month), however, indicates that Dickens was intent on seeing the new work noticed in the magazine the very next day. His purpose was served--*The Examiner* and *The Atlas* noticed it on 28 February and *The Daily News* on 1 March.

⁵³Partlow, pp.27-43.

⁵⁴Partlow, p.28.

⁵⁵*Nonesuch*, I, 522.

future from such general report as might reach my ears. For five years I have never broken this rule, once, and I am unquestionably the happier for it, and certainly lose no wisdom." Available evidence, however, indicates that Dickens could not just be satisfied with "general report"--he would often read cuttings and in most cases refer to them in his letters and prefaces. On 14 July 1839 he thanked Forster for sending him two copies of *The Sun* which reviewed *Nicholas Nickleby*.⁵⁶ In 1847 he wrote to Forster how unhappy he was at reading *The Times* review of *Cricket on the Hearth*:

I see that the "good old Times" are again at issue with the inimitable B. Another touch of the blunt razor on B's nervous system.--Friday morning. Inimitable very mouldy and dull. Hardly able to work. Dreamt of Timeses all night. Disposed to go to New Zealand and start a magazine.⁵⁷

During his visit to Dover in 1854, Dickens happened to read a review of *Hard Times* in the *Illustrated London News*. The review was unfavourable and Dickens was almost certain that it was written by Peter Cunningham. He wrote to him directly with the following retort:

The mischief of such a statement [on strike] is twofold. First, it encourages the public in the

⁵⁶*Pilgrim*, I, 562.

⁵⁷*Nonesuch*, II, p.3, 5 January 1847.

impossibility that books are produced in that very sudden and cavalier manner (as poor Newton used to feign that he produced the elaborate drawings he made in his madness, by winking at his table); and secondly in this instance it has this bearing: it localises (so far as your readers are concerned) a story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England, and it will cause, as I know by former experience, characters to be fitted on to individuals whom I never saw or heard of in my life.

I do not suppose that you can do anything to set this misstatement right, being made; nor do I wish you to set it right. But if you will, at any future time, ask me what the fact is before you state it, I will tell you, as frankly as it is possible for one friend to tell another, what the truth is and what it is not.⁵⁸

In 1857 E.B. Hamley attacked Dickens in a pungent review of *Little Dorrit* in his article, "Remonstrance with Dickens," which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Dickens had read this article and "was sufficiently put out by it to be angry with myself for having so long

⁵⁸*Nonesuch*, II, 546.

been constant to a good resolution. . . ." ⁵⁹ It is intriguing that Dickens was mentioning this "resolution" once again when he was not adhering to it. Just a few months later we find him writing a full length article for his *Household Words* on "Curious Mistake in *The Edinburgh Review*" (1 August 1857) as reply to James Fitzjames Stephen's "License of Modern Novelist" criticising Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. ⁶⁰

At the time of writing *Bleak House* Dickens encountered several criticisms for raising controversial issues in the novel. Lord Denman attacked Dickens in *The Standard* for his satire of Mrs. Jellyby and her foreign mission. G.H. Lewes found himself at odds with Dickens for his mistaken idea about the feasibility of death by spontaneous combustion. The portrayal of Leigh Hunt as Skimpole raised quite a furor in contemporary literary circles. All these, however, will be discussed in detail in later chapters of the present study.

VI

Bleak House was serialized by Messrs. Bradbury and Evans from March 1852 to September 1853. Each number, excepting the last one, consisted of thirty-two pages of text and two illustrations by Hablot K. Browne. The

⁵⁹ *Nonesuch*, II, 861.

⁶⁰ Stephen, James Fitzjames, "The License of Modern Novelists," *Edinburgh Review* 106 (1857), 124-56.

final double number, XIX and XX, consisted of forty-eight pages of text, four illustrations, the Preface and a Table of Contents with Errata. The price for the monthly numbers was one shilling each and the double number was two shillings. The novel was published in one volume from the stereotypes of the original type-settings for the monthly parts on 12 September 1853 and was sold at twenty-one shillings a copy.⁶¹

Bleak House was reviewed, as it was published, month by month. Since my purpose is to focus on the significance of the process of serialization and simultaneous reception, there will be an emphasis in this study on the reviews that appeared during its monthly serialization. But I have also taken into consideration the reviews that appeared later, at different times, particularly after the publication of the Cheap Edition of 1858 and the Charles Dickens Edition of 1868. I have also made frequent references in my study to letters and diaries of Dickens's contemporaries, and newspaper correspondence and reports published during Dickens's lifetime. Although the scope of my study is primarily limited to the contemporary period, I have attempted to discuss several issues in the light of criticisms extending up

⁶¹The Publishers' announcement in *Bleak House*, Number XIX and XX, September 1853.

to the present day.

II. The Opening Number

I

The inaugural reception of the first number is of paramount importance to the success of a serial novel, and Dickens must have been thoroughly aware of this. He took great care in the planning and writing of the first number of *Bleak House*. Normally he would take about a fortnight to write thirty-two pages of text. But the opening instalment would obviously take a longer time. Dickens completed the first number of *Dombey and Son* in about four weeks;⁶² for *David Copperfield* it took him about two and a half months.⁶³ He devoted a much longer time to write *Bleak House* Number I. He started writing it sometime at the end of November 1851 and was still "hard at work . . . on my new book all day" until 4 February 1852.⁶⁴ Four days later he was writing to Miss Coutts, "Would you care to

⁶²The first Number-plan of *Dombey and Son* was not written until 27 June 1846; on 27 July Forster received the MS of the first four chapters. See Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Alan Horsman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p.xiv.

⁶³Dickens did not start *David Copperfield* until the middle of February 1849; he was still at work on 19 April. The first number appeared in May 1849. See Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, II (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), 664-65.

⁶⁴Forster, II, 96 and letter to Bulwar Lytton, *Nonesuch*, II, 375, 4 February 1852.

hear my first number before it comes out?"⁶⁵ He must have felt quite confident about the success of the opening number.

Bleak House Number I, as mentioned earlier, appeared on 27 February 1852.⁶⁶ It was greeted on the very next day in two weekly newspapers, *The Examiner* and *The Atlas*. The former noticed it by quoting a few passages from the first chapter of the number without making any comment. *The Atlas* brought out a full-length review, starting with a hearty welcome to the new story:

Once again we have a happy hour's reading ensured to us each month as it comes round. Once again we have great delineator of manners of our own time, and the profound anatomist of the human heart and intellect in manhood; youth and age at work to produce something which the world shall not willingly let die. Once again we bid a hearty welcome to the author who, of all others in our day, can touch the springs of human sympathy, causing mirth or tears to follow at his bidding, and who has never written but with the evident purpose of doing

⁶⁵ Nonesuch, II, 376-77, 8 February 1852.

⁶⁶ ". . . on the 27th of February, the windows of the bookshops displayed once more the familiar . . . monthly serial of Charles Dickens . . . *Bleak House*." *The Critic*, 15 March 1852, p.143.

good.⁶⁷

The enthusiastic response of the reading public to a new Dickens novel was evident in the huge sale of the first number and its wide reception in almost all the important newspapers in the first week of March that year.⁶⁸

Number I opens with a magnificent evocation of the London fog. At the very heart of the fog the Lord Chancellor is busy in his Court of Chancery with the cause of Jarndyce and Jarndyce which has been dragging on for years. The Lord Chancellor has to pass an order allowing two young people, a young girl and a boy, both orphans and connected with the case, to reside with the next of kin, a cousin, several times removed. The Chancellor dismisses the case for the time being wishing to see the young people to satisfy himself on the subject. Chapter 2 takes the reader to a world of fashion, "which is not unlike the Court of Chancery," showing My Lady Dedlock in conversation with Mr. Tulkinghorn, the family lawyer, on the same Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, from which Lady Dedlock expects settlement of some of her property. While Mr. Tulkinghorn is reading from some legal papers, Lady

⁶⁷*The Atlas*, 28 February 1852, p.138.

⁶⁸30,000 copies of *Bleak House* Number I had been sold in the very first week of its publication. See Forster, II, 123; see also Robert L. Patten, "The Sale of Dickens's Works" in Philip Collins, ed. *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), Appendix I, p.619.

Dedlock asks him in a very unusual animated tone the name of the person who has copied those papers. She pretends it is just a general curiosity but soon faints for some unknown reason. In the next chapter, entitled "A Progress," Esther Summerson narrates her past. Born of unknown parentage, she was brought up by Mrs. Barbery, whom she had believed to be her godmother, but who later proved to be her aunt. John Jarndyce, of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, took pity on her, helped her acquire such education as was necessary for the life of a governess, and now entrusts her with the responsibility of looking after Ada and Richard, the two young people mentioned in Chapter 1. In the concluding chapter on "Telescopic Philanthropy," Esther has a peep into the disarrayed household of Mrs. Jellyby, whose concern for the natives of Borrioboola Gha affords her no time to care for her family. The number closes with Esther's encounter with Miss Jellyby, who, despite all her efforts to be rude, declares her fondness for Esther.

On reading the opening number, Dickens's contemporaries were satisfied that the new novel promised an advance in excellence even upon *David Copperfield*. The reviewer of the *The Weekly News and Chronicle* recorded with pleasure that

the new tale bids fair, in depth of thought and happiness of fancy, in cheerful wisdom, reflective humour and varied human interest, fully to equal if not to surpass, any of its predecessors.⁶⁹

The reviewer of *Bell's Life in London* claimed:

If one showed Cuvier the smallest bone he could tell what animal it belonged to. Metaphorically speaking we can do the same now. We have examined only a small joint of this new creation, and we think we can say that when hereafter it comes before us in a perfected state, we shall judge it worthy of the vast fame of its author. This first glimpse at Bleak House satisfies us.⁷⁰

Bleak House Number I was reviewed in *The Athenaeum*, *The Atlas*, *Bell's Life in London*, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, *The Critic*, *The Daily News*, *The Examiner*, *The Leader*, *The Literary Gazette*, *The Morning Advertiser*, *The Magnet*, *The News of the World*, *The Observer*, *The Standard*, *The Weekly Dispatch*, and *The Weekly News and Chronicle*. They all praised the admirable description of the fog, the vivid portrayal of the interior of Lincoln's Inn Hall, and the beautiful presentation of the working of the Court of

⁶⁹*The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 6 March 1852, p.154.

⁷⁰*Bell's Life in London*, 14 March 1852, p.8.

Chancery with the Lord Chancellor in the centre, surrounded by judges, clerks, lawyers, solicitors, and suitors. They could all guess that a leading case in the Court of Chancery was to form the centre of the novel and the principal characters were to be connected with the suit.

From the description that is given us of the Court of Chancery and its doings, from mention that is made of a case that has been before it for several generations, entailing an expense to the litigants of £70,000--the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce--we can guess that a young lady, Ada Clare, and a young gentleman, Richard Carstone, wards in Chancery under that suit, will be prominent personages in the story, and that Esther Summerson--also connected with the suit--will be the heroine.

This was from the reviewer of *Bell's Life in London*⁷¹ and it was typical of many other reviews.⁷²

The Court of Chancery was a topical subject when Dickens was contemplating his 'new book' in August

⁷¹*Bell's Life in London*, 14 March 1852, p.8.

⁷²"The leading influence of the piece is to be, a pet Chancery suit . . . "--*The Athenaeum*, 6 March 1852, p.270; ". . . from the contents of the part before us, we believe that the cause of "Jarndyce v. Jarndyce" will afford the materials for the tale which is to be known by the title of *Bleak House*."--*The Atlas*, 28 February 1852, p.138; "From the first four chapters of *Bleak House*,--ominous title!--we gather that it is a tale of Chancery . . . "--*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.229.

1851. The inefficiency of the Chancery, its intolerable delays, the expenses involved in the suits, the tragic consequences of so many victims of litigation were subjects discussed in the press and in public. Dickens himself had been involved in five Chancery suits in 1844 on the issue of copyright and the experience must have had some effect on his mind. In January 1851 *The Times* reported, "We could crowd our columns day after day with remonstrances which are addressed to ourselves, especially with reference to the present state of the Court of Chancery."⁷³ Earlier, two articles on "The Martyrs in Chancery" had been published in Dickens's own periodical, *Household Words*.⁷⁴ For the main cause, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Dickens was drawing on his memory of a case instituted in 1834, and still continuing while the serialization of *Bleak House* was in progress.⁷⁵

II

Dickens's readers rejoiced to find that this time he had taken up his cudgel against the evils of Chancery. *The Athenaeum* hailed his effort as "well timed."⁷⁶ *The Weekly News and Chronicle* was very hopeful. The reviewer of this paper said:

⁷³*The Times*, 1 January 1851.

⁷⁴See *Household Words*, 7 December 1850 p.250, and 15 February 1851, p.493.

⁷⁵*Nonesuch*, II, 481.

⁷⁶*The Athenaeum*, 6 March 1852, p.270.

Mr. Dickens has, in all ways, deserved well of his country, in none more than by his admirable skill with which he has known how to blend with the highest genius of the writer of fiction, some of the rarest and best attributes of the enlightened social philosopher and true practical reformer.⁷⁷

The reviewer of *The Morning Advertiser* was the most encouraging. He said:

. . . we have before us, in common with tens of thousands, the last-born offspring of the brain of one who has done, and yet promises to do, good service in the cause of social regeneration. Thus--"to this little drop of ink, Which falling on this simple sheet of paper, Writes that which maketh thousands--millions--think," do we owe, in the instance of Mr. Charles Dickens, far more than your chairmen, presidents, vice-presidents, committeemen, lecturers, orators, &c, into the cause of improvement, real or fancied, genuine or humbug, are willing to admit.

The reviewer reminded his readers how Dickens's vivid portrayal of Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby* led to the "extermination of that most virulent social exantheme, the Yorkshire schools." He also mentioned

⁷⁷*The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 6 March 1852, p.155.

how *Oliver Twist* has given an abiding power, a general impetus to the humane exertions of the promoters of ragged schools, to the visitations of the dwellings of those who are too wretched to be outwardly virtuous, and to the repressing and correcting of 'porochial' and other tyranny." The reviewer said that his "principal motive" in reviewing the new novel was to give it as much publicity as possible because in this novel

the effort of a great *censoꝛ morum* is directed to the exposure--which must be synonymous with the extirpation--of one of the most fearful gangrenes of modern society. Let us hope, in this assault on the demon of Chancery, that, as another demon took flight at the hurling of Luther's inkstand, so a second "Reformation"--that of this widow-robbing "abomination of desolation"--may be accelerated by these stabs of the pen.⁷⁸

Some reviewers, however, had reservations. *The Leader* expressed its doubt whether Dickens was the right person to take up the cause of the "colossal nuisance of Chancery."⁷⁹ Lord Denman, a former Chief Justice and once a friend of Dickens, anonymously reviewed *Bleak House* Numbers I to VII in *The Standard*. Attacking Dickens vehemently for his belated concern

⁷⁸*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

⁷⁹*The Leader*, 6 March 1852, p.229.

for law-reform, Lord Denman said:

Nearly 20 years have elapsed since Boz first attracted public notice by his acuteness and ingenuity. During the whole of that time the abuses of Chancery were at their height, and were visible to every eye in ruinous houses, neglected farms, disordered intellects, and broken hearts. Active exertions were making to remove the monstrous evils of that court, but we do not remember in any one of the ten or twelve large volumes which bear his name, a single passage which points public attention to them. But now the reformers appear to have gained their end, and we have great reason to believe that the last head of the infernal hydra is severed from the body; and now first Mr. Dickens takes an active part in promoting Chancery reform. Admirable as he here is, both for pathos and humour, his is not the part of Prince Henry who slew the enemy, but the part of Falstaff who, seeing him lie dead, inflicted a new wound upon his carcass.⁸⁰

Movements for law-reform in England had started as early as 1826 when the Reports of the First Chancery Commission had been published; another Commission was instituted in 1850. Russell's Chancery Reform Act and

⁸⁰*The Standard*, 13 September 1852, [p.3].

the Chancery Procedure Act were passed in 1851 and 1852 respectively. Lord Denman himself was actively associated with these movements. But still he was not just when he accused Dickens of not caring to do anything about Chancery reform earlier. Dickens took it to heart when he saw *The Standard* review after it was published in the form of a pamphlet in December 1852. Later when there was an occasion, he wrote to Mrs. Cropper, Lord Denman's daughter:

The pamphlet, being angry with me on these wholly mistaken grounds, objects that I come at the Death of Chancery and might have attacked it before. The most serious and pathetic point I tried with all indignation and intensity to make, in my first book, (*Pickwick*) was the slow torture and death of a Chancery prisoner. From the hour to this, if I have been set on anything, it has been on exhibiting the abuses of the Law.⁸¹

Lord Denman's displeasure was caused by another reason on which I shall have to say more later. For the present, it can be pointed out that when *Bleak House* began to appear, things were still going very badly in

⁸¹Letter to Mrs. Cropper, 20 December 1852, printed by Harry Stone in "Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 12(1957), 195.

the Court of Chancery.⁸² People were still very critical of it both inside Parliament and outside. Only two weeks after the appearance of the first number, Lord Lyndhurst could be heard warning his Lordship, the Lord Chancellor, in the House of Lords, against postponement of the bill on "the reform of the Court of Chancery on the footing of the report of Commissioners," since "they were aware that the public looked to that measure with regard and intense interest." In reply, the Lord Chancellor himself admitted that "there never was a time when a man who had a reform of the law at heart had a better opportunity than the present for carrying his views into effect (Hear, hear)."⁸³

In the same week the Chancery Reform Association held a meeting to consider the recommendations of the Chancery Reform Commissioners. One of the speakers in this meeting was Mr. Challinor, a solicitor of Leek, who sent Dickens the details of a case which the author used for his chapter on Gridley.⁸⁴ He characterized the Court of Chancery

as being a system by which the settlement of

⁸²See William S. Holdsworth, *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 113-14.

⁸³*The Morning Chronicle*, 13 March 1852, p. 2.

⁸⁴See Forster, II, 119 & 429 and Preface to *Bleak House*. The manuscript of *Bleak House* shows that Dickens originally intended to make the acknowledgement in a footnote to Chapter 24.

any question in dispute was deferred to the utmost possible time; and by which the money might of the kingdom had often lorded it over the humbler right. It was a sort of legal gambling-table where the evil passions of the gamblers were worked upto the greatest possible extent for the benefit of the keepers of the table. The keystone of the abuses of the Court of Chancery was the preventing of the parties and their witnesses before the judge who tried the cause. Then there was a continual system of reference from judge to judge, which, as the opinion of only a single judge was taken at each step, was never conclusive.⁸⁵

This fairly represents the view held by the general public on the slow process and evils of the Court of Chancery.⁸⁶

The reviewer of *The Weekly Dispatch*, however, objected to Dickens's involvement with the intricacies of the law for quite a different reason. After reading the first number he had no doubt that the novel would be "full of interest and tenderness perhaps more artistic than any yet given us." But he was not happy

⁸⁵*The Morning Chronicle*, 18 March 1852, p.2.

⁸⁶Mr. Challinor's reference to the Court of Chancery as a "legal gambling-table" is interesting. The panel on the left-bottom of the green-cover of *Bleak House* showing a game of chess with an arbitrator in the middle also tries to depict the Court of Chancery as a game.

with the idea of Dickens's being a "St. George of Chancery Reform." "Better spare a better man" for such a purpose, he said. His reasons were:

We would rather lose all the interest we have in the thousands of unsettled and never-to-be settled cases that lie there in eternal hyberration, rather than that we should lose him in the dust and the dregs of these not-half-enough abused establishment.⁸⁷

The reviewer lamented the fact that in the present novel Dickens had preferred the theme of "the dust and the dregs" of the Court of Chancery to his "old path of humour, in which he is unrivalled." The very sombre title of the serial seemed unpromising to the contemporaries. *The Morning Advertiser* described it as an "ominous title."⁸⁸ *The Critic* was surprised to find a total lack of anything interesting to talk about in the magazines for that month; it was as if everyone had conspired to maintain the bleakness of the inauguration of *Bleak House*.⁸⁹ And yet the transition from the grotesque humour of Newman Noggs and Jonas Chuzzlewit to a "creature of grace and gentleness like Esther Summerson, awakens the curiosity to know how the story

⁸⁷*The Weekly Dispatch*, 7 March 1852, p.160.

⁸⁸*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

⁸⁹*The Critic*, 15 March 1852, p.143.

will be carried on--how she will act and think."⁹⁰

III

It was quite obvious to readers that Esther was to be the centre of the novel. They were, however, fascinated by the fact that Dickens, a male author, chose to tell his story from the point of view of a woman narrator. Dickens had already proved to be the master of first-person story-telling in *David Copperfield*. In their reception of *Bleak House* the critics never failed to mention this novel which was still lingering in their minds. The memory was further enlivened by the discovery that in the new novel also Dickens was adopting the same autobiographical narrative technique, but with a difference. As the reviewer of *The Atlas* remarked:

The story is to be told as an autobiography, like *David Copperfield*; but the narrator in this case is a woman. Could any artrist have chosen a subject more full of material and promise?⁹¹

Why did Dickens assign autobiographical narration to a woman in the novel he wrote immediately after *David Copperfield*? One reason might be that he had realized it would help him to make the emotional

⁹⁰*The Weekly Dispatch*, 7 March 1852, p.160.

⁹¹*The Atlas*, 28 February 1852, p.138.

involvement in the novel more effective. But there is another possibility which cannot be ruled out. Part of *David Copperfield* is the story of the novelist himself. But this was not known to anyone besides his most intimate friend, John Forster. Despite all the applause and elation at the success of the novel, Dickens could not possibly allow the public to believe that David was the other name of Dickens. It is well-known how reserved and secretive he was in personal affairs. He was particularly sensitive about his blacking-factory days, an account of which he included in *David Copperfield*. He had of course written about the actual episode in the autobiography he had attempted at one stage of his life. But so intense were his feeling about it that he felt relieved only when he could burn the whole thing.⁹²

One disadvantage of autobiographical narration is that the readers always tend to identify the hero or the heroine with the author. This was more so in the 1850s. Dickens could not perhaps rest in peace until he could dissuade his readers from their belief that whatever happened to David must be true of Dickens. He succeeded in doing this most effectively by writing part of his next novel in the same autobiographical form, but this time from the point of view of a woman. His success can be gauged from a passage in *The Daily*

⁹²Johnson, I, 83.

News:

The novelty of Dickens's last work, "David Copperfield", was its autobiographical character. The successive thoughts, feelings, and modes of expressing them, of the boy, the youth, and then of the young man stepping over the threshold of what is called 'life,' of a young husband; and, lately, of a sturdy warrior with the world, were so perfectly simulated, that the public settled without doubt or hesitation that "David Copperfield" is another name for Charles Dickens. Perhaps there will be a little wavering of this opinion, after a few numbers of *Bleak House* have appeared; or, if the author go on as he has begun, it will be found that he has portrayed in the first person with equal truth, minuteness--and, necessarily, with greater delicacy and refinement--the character, inmost sentiments, and thoughts of a woman.⁹³

At any rate, the contemporaries were quite fascinated by Esther's story-telling. It seemed to them very real and life-like. But they admitted that this method might prove disadvantageous to both the author and the reader "unless a master hand governs the narrative." In *Bleak House* "there is displayed a

⁹³*The Daily News*, 1 March 1852, p.2.

subtlety of power in thus selecting one individual out of the stormy struggle of life, with its myriads of crowding combatants, and leaving the rest to fight as they may."⁹⁴

By narrating part of the number from the omniscient point of view and leaving the rest to Esther, Dickens showed an adroit handling of his narrative technique. The experiment proved successful. After encountering the world of Chancery intrigues through the omniscient narrator, readers were straightway absorbed in sympathizing with a character who they could easily recognize as the central figure. Such attachment is very important for the success of the first instalment of a serial novel. As the reviewer of *The Morning Advertiser* said, the autobiographical narrative in Chapter 3 brought the reader "in mental intercommunicatin, or . . . en rapport" with Esther Summerson.⁹⁵ According to another critic this method

puts a reader of ordinary perception, and with average imaginative power, in thorough rapport with the heroine. The traits of development which succeeded in this early portion of the story expand the first idea of Esther

Summerson; but neither add to nor alter it. All (and there is an unusually great progress of

⁹⁴*The Weekly Dispatch*, 7 March 1852, p.160.

⁹⁵*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

story in this first number) she says and does, and everything that happens to her you expect from her, and of her, just as Partridge expected Hamlet to be frightened when he saw the Ghost. The circumstances, for instance, attending her leave-taking at school are so natural, that no other than those actually narrated could, apparently, have taken place.

Bleak House was not concerned with a limited group of individuals as *David Copperfield* was. In Number I itself there was a wide variety of characters and incidents. In a novel like this the narration could not be left to one single character, because, as the reviewer could foresee,

scenes must be portrayed which a woman could neither witness or describe; consequently, although the story will, we infer, be strung upon the delicate thread of a woman's autobiography, the author occasionally steps in and asserts himself in the third person.⁹⁶

Esther, a typical Victorian woman, could not be expected to narrate the intricacies of the legal system. She also could not involve herself prematurely with the affairs of the Dedlocks, which must be presented simultaneously with her own story at the beginning. The critics seemed to have overlooked this

⁹⁶*The Daily News*, 1 March 1852, p.2.

point.

IV

This however, leads to another question, why the Dedlocks at all in the first number? In his essay on "Dickens at Work in *Bleak House*," H.P. Sucksmith has pointed out that Chapter 2 on the Dedlocks was interpolated in the first number to emphasize "Dickens's ironical vision, his feeling for organic unity, his skill in construction;" to achieve this it was essential that the "worlds of Chancery and the Dedlocks be linked as aspects of a single satirical view."⁹⁷ But a close examination of the original manuscript and the corrected proofs of *Bleak House* reveals that Chapter 2 was the result of an exigency of serial publication.

For each number Dickens had to write text sufficient to fill thirty-two pages. The Number-plan shows that Dickens had intended only three chapters for Number I: "In Chancery", "In Progress" and "Telescopic Philanthropy". He had written thirty-two manuscript pages, but when printed, the text fell short of the required number of pages. This happened several times in *Bleak House*: in Number X, Number XIII and Number XVI.

He filled in the gap in Number X by writing half a page

⁹⁷H.P. Sucksmith, "Dickens at Work in *Bleak House*: A Critical Examination of His Memoranda and Number Plans," *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 9(1965), p.64.

of additional matter on the proof itself. For Number XVI he had to write one and a half pages of additional matter in five separate passages marked A,B,C,D,E and distribute them very skilfully at five different places in the text. In Number XIII there was a gap of about half a page on the last page of Chapter 40, and the compositor must have asked Dickens for additional matter. At first, Dickens wanted to write something as he did elsewhere. Then he changed his mind and wrote in a marginal note: "Printer--Manage to bring this down, as I would rather not write more in. It can be easily done by bringing the previous chapter over, a little. -- CD." The printer complied with these instructions. In the corrected proofs, Chapter 39 ends on page 395, but in the published serial the Chapter was brought to almost half of page 396.⁹⁸

Such arrangements, however, would not work for Number I, since it required an expansion of quite a few pages. Only after writing five additional pages, numbered as A,B,C,D,E in the original manuscripts, Dickens could fulfil the printer's requirement of thirty-two pages for the instalment.

Does the Dedlock interpolation affect the unity of the number? A careful reading of the Chapter as part of the first number will show its inconsistency and

⁹⁸Corrected Proofs of *Bleak House*, pp.404, 395-96. (Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Press Mark 48. B. 16).

superfluity. Dickens was careful as far as Chapters 1 and 2 were concerned. He tried to link the two chapters by opening Chapter 2 with:

It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other as the crow flies.

But there is no such link between Chapters 2 and 3, and consequently, Chapter 3 might seem to begin abruptly. The reviewer of *The Morning Advertiser* noted this and said:

There is a delicious bit of the rural and domestic in the autobiography, which is somewhat abruptly introduced in Chapter 3 . . .⁹⁹

But there is a good link between Chapters 1 and 3 and the narrative flow is smooth and natural. Chapter 1 ends with Lord Chancellor wishing to "speak with both the young people" to satisfy himself "on the subject of their residing with their cousin." Chapter 3 leads to the same "subject"--the Lord Chancellor's interview with Richard and Ada, the two "young people"--after a flash-back narration of Esther's past life.

But Dickens seems to have made the best of the situation. By introducing the Dedlocks in the first

⁹⁹*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

number he raised a great deal of curiosity in the readers, the most essential quality that goes to make the first instalment successful. "The Dedlocks are involved somehow in the 'great cause', but in what way is not shown by the interview with Mr. Tulkinghorn, the family lawyer," the reviewer remarked.¹⁰⁰

V

The opening number concluded with Esther's narration about Mrs. Jellyby and her "telescopic philanthropy." Contemporaries "thoroughly enjoyed" this Chapter. They were quick to appreciate that Dickens was here satirizing the recent tendencies in women to indulge in extremes of philanthropic concern for sufferings in distant overseas countries at the expense of home missions. The panel at the bottom-centre of the green-cover design of *Bleak House* showing the figure of a man with a fool's cap holding a banner with "Exeter Hall" written prominently on it, while another carrying a scroll bearing the words "Humbug"--made it quite explicit.¹⁰¹ *The Morning Advertiser*, however, observed:

The number closes with "Telescopic Philanthropy", a piece of pleasant exaggeration of quackery which in some minds assumes an aspect of monomania. Mrs. Jellyby, whose

¹⁰⁰*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

¹⁰¹See Philip Collins, *A Critical Commentary on Bleak House* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp.12-13.

sympathies strengthen in the ratio of the distance, and we had almost said, inutility, of their object, is by no means a novel character in the pages of popular literature.¹⁰²

Dickens did not want to introduce a novelty. His object was to attack a tendency which was causing more harm to benevolent causes than good. He must have been aware that in his satirical attack on the foreign missions, he was echoing many others who had said the same thing in different ways. *Punch* had published a series of articles ridiculing the women attending Exeter Hall meetings of the Foreign Mission organizations. Disraeli attacked the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in *Sybil*; so did Carlyle in his *Latter Day Pamphlets* and other essays.¹⁰³ In his own article on the Niger Expedition, published in 1848, Dickens had said:

The stone that is dropped into the ocean of ignorance at Exeter Hall, must make its widening circles, one beyond another, until they reach the negro's country in their natural expansion. There is a broad dark sea between the Strand in London, and the Niger, where those rings are not yet shining . . . Believe

¹⁰²*The Morning Advertiser*, 6 March 1852, p.3.

¹⁰³[Disraeli] The Earl of Beaconsfield, K.G., *Sybil or The Two Nations*, London: Nelson, 1845, p.121. Hereafter cited as Disraeli.

it, African Civilisation, Church of England
 Missionary, and all other Missionary Societies!
 The work at home must be completed thoroughly,
 or there is no hope abroad. To your tents,
 O Israel! but see they are your own tents!¹⁰⁴

But it was Dickens's Mrs. Jellyby that the
 contemporaries referred to when later that year the
 "women of England" gathered at Strafford House to send
 a memorial to the "women of the United States of
 America on the question of abolishing slavery."¹⁰⁵

But the critics wondered whether the Chapter on
 Mrs. Jellyby was meant to serve any purpose in the plot
 development of the story. The reviewer of *The Athenaeum*
 preferred not to make any comment. "We will say
 nothing," he said, "for the very good reason that we
 feel we can speak of them more safely when we know what
 place Mr. Dickens means to assign to them in the
 movement of his story."¹⁰⁶ To another reviewer the
 character of Caddy Jellyby indicated some plot
 possibility.

¹⁰⁴Quoted in House, pp.88-89.

¹⁰⁵The memorial address, originally proposed by the
 Earl of Shaftesbury, was published in all the important
 London newspapers in November 1852. It was endorsed by
 the "women of England" at a meeting at Strafford House
 on 26 November 1852. The move was severely criticized
 by the general public and the one name that was in
 everyone's lip was that of Mrs. Jellyby. I shall have
 much to say on this in a later chapter. See *The Times*,
 9 November and 3, 6, & 9 December 1852, *Bell's New*
Weekly Messenger, 5 December 1852.

¹⁰⁶*The Athenaeum*, 6 March 1852, p.271.

The eldest daughter, Caddy, a slatternly, good-looking girl, occupied day and night as her mother's amenuensis, grows up in hate, malice, and uncharitableness to all who are mentally superior, or better conditioned than herself.

The reviewer believed that "Mrs. Jellyby's African Philanthropy" was likely to be tedious unless "Miss Caddy, the daughter, comes strongly in relief, as it is likely, she will."¹⁰⁷ *The Literary Gazette* thought that Mrs. Jellyby was there because "Mr. Dickens loves to diversify his narrative" with such "eccentric incidents."¹⁰⁸

VI

Bleak House Number I promised its original readers interesting developments and a powerful story. It had all the ingredients for a successful first instalment of a serial novel. The Court of Chancery and Mrs. Jellyby episodes hit the topics of the day; to talk about "high life", represented by the Dedlocks, was a contemporary fancy, particularly when there was a hint

¹⁰⁷*The Magnet*, 8 March 1852, p.6.

¹⁰⁸*The Literary Gazette* 6 March 1852, p.228.

of a scandal;¹⁰⁹ governesses drew a great deal of sympathy from the middle-class readers of those days--Esther's gentle character combined with her sense of guilt on account of her uncertain parentage absorbed their interest from her very first appearance. Characters were numerous, but they were meaningfully placed, directing the readers' attention to four different groups in their respective set up--the law people, the Dedlock group, Esther Summerson with Richard and Ada, and Mrs. Jellyby. These groups in turn represented four different themes the novel was concerned with--the theme of Chancery, satire on the false pride of aristocratic families, the central theme of Esther Summerson and of courtship and marriage, and the criticism of foreign mission societies. The characters and incidents were again all united by an intricate web of relationships, each in its own way to the Chancery, and to one another, and the links were further strengthened by the symbolic function of the London fog which overshadows the Court of Chancery, the Dedlock House in town, and Mrs. Jellyby's house at Holborn. The first number thus not only stood by itself but also served as an epitome of the entire novel.

¹⁰⁹Referring to her own novel, *Deerbrook*, which appeared in 1839, Harriet Martineau says in her *Autobiography*: "People liked high life in novels, and low life, and ancient life; and life of any rank presented by Dickens in his peculiar artistic light." Martineau, II, 115.

The opening number must also lead to future events. It must raise the reader's curiosity to look forward to the next and subsequent parts. *Bleak House* Number I fulfils this requirement also most satisfactorily. After finishing the number with absorbing interest the reader found himself left with many questions unanswered. There was, for example, repeated mention of John Jarndyce. But he was not introduced and those who were going to be closely involved with him had neither seen him, nor did they know anything about him. The mystery was heightened by the gothic implication of the name *Bleak House* where they were all supposed to live. And why did Jarndyce take so much interest in Esther Summerson, whose parentage was unknown? There was an element of suspense in Lady Dedlock's sudden animation and fainting at the sight of the law-writer's handwriting. Mr. Tulkinghorn was a man after family secrets. What was he going to find out about Lady Dedlock? The etchings on the green cover were suggestive. The figure on a right panel showing a copy-clerk indicated that there was something to expect from the law-writer's handwriting. The panel on the left depicting a man digging with a spade indicated the unearthing of mysteries. The games of Blind Man's Buff on the top, Battledore and Shuttlecock on the bottom left and Chess on the bottom right foretold fateful circumstances in the lives of the

characters connected with the law suit. This was further elaborated by the parting of a couple with Cupid standing in between them. The windvane in another panel was pointed towards the East indicating impending dangerous circumstances and troubles.¹¹⁰ There was much to anticipate from the new novel and the reader could not but "wait with impatience the appearance of a second part."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰For further discussions on the cover-design see Collins, *Critical Commentary*, pp.12-13, and J.R. Tye, "Legal Caricature: Cruikshank Analogues to the *Bleak House* Cover," *Dickensian*, 69(1973), 38-41.

¹¹¹*Bell's Life in London*, 14 March 1852, p.8.

III. Numbers Two Through Seven

I

Bleak House Numbers II through Number VII were regularly reviewed in *The News of the World* and *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*. Number II was reviewed in *The Atlas* and *The Daily News*; Numbers II, V, VI and VII in *The Observer*; Numbers IV and V in *The Morning Advertiser*; Number II and IV in *The Weekly Dispatch* and Numbers I through VII in *The Standard*.

The rousing reception given to Number I helped the sale of subsequent numbers.¹¹² Dickens was very happy at "its most enormous success" and felt that the reader would like the novel "better and better as you go on . . . all the prestige of *Copperfield* (which was very great) falling upon it and raising its circulation above my other books."¹¹³ In November Dickens noted that its circulation was "half as large again as

¹¹²The demand for the new serial was so high that Bradbury and Evans had to print an extra 4,000 copies of Number I within a week of its publication. Expecting a much higher sale after the favourable reviews of Number I, the publisher raised the printing from 25,000 to 32,000 copies. For an exhaustive study of the sale records of *Bleak House* See Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp.224-27.

¹¹³Letter to W.F. de Cerjat, Nonesuch, II, 394, 8 May 1852.

Copperfield."¹¹⁴ Its steady average sale of 34,000 copies during its serialization was very reassuring to Dickens. "I believe," he observed in his Preface, "I have never had so many readers as in this book."¹¹⁵

Dickens's reputation as an author had been spreading far and wide at this time. On April 15, 1852, *The Critic* noted that Messers Harpers had paid \$2,000 to Dickens "to obtain a copy for prior publication of [*Bleak House*] in America."¹¹⁶ In its earlier issue of the same month it reported that half-a dozen German translators were at work on *Bleak House*.

Dickens and his publishers thought about the possibility of a French version of the novel, but, it appears, they did not expect a German translation. The green cover of *Bleak House* Number I carried a notice: "Notice is hereby given that the author of 'Bleak House' reserves to himself the right of publishing a Translation in France." From Number III onward the notice was changed to "The Author of this Work notifies that it is his intention to reserve the right of translating it."¹¹⁷ The rephrasing of the publisher's

¹¹⁴Letter to Mrs. Richard Watson, Nonesuch, II, 430, 22 November 1852.

¹¹⁵Preface to 1853 edition of *Bleak House*.

¹¹⁶*The Critic*, April 15, 1852, 216. Harper had actually paid \$1,728. Patten, p.233.

¹¹⁷In his authentic study, *International Copyright Law and the Publisher in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), Simon Nowell-Smith does not give any information on the German translations of *Bleak House*.

notice for translation right on the front cover of the later numbers of the novel suggests that *The Critic* probably gave the right information.

Referring to the copyright issue, the reviewer remarked: "Dickens may count on German readers of *Bleak House* by the thousand; though not a groschen will he get for the amusement he affords them." But the recent agreement between England and France, he added, had secured to Dickens some income from the French versions of his novels "which are refused him in the Canadas, themselves integral portions of the empire to which he belonged."¹¹⁸ There was a similar agreement between England and Germany, but it appears that it did not have any effect on the pirated versions of British works in Germany. As far as Canada was concerned, the copyright law was in existence for the colonies under the British empire, but it was not enforceable because of Canada's extensive open frontier with the United States from where pirated editions of British books were available to Canadians at a much cheaper price. As a result "very little cash reached very few United Kingdom authors and publishers."¹¹⁹

II

"It is no small praise, but it is strict truth, to say

¹¹⁸*The Critic* 15 April 1852, p.216.

¹¹⁹Nowell-Smith, p.86.

the surpassing interest of this tale is as fully maintained as in the first number." This was how *Bleak House* Number II was greeted by *Bell's Life in London*.¹²⁰ *The Observer* found it proceeding "in point of interest,"¹²¹ and most other reviewers of the month agreed. *The Atlas* reported that the first number of *Bleak House* had been read, discussed and criticized widely, and interest in the new story grew much further when Number II appeared. But instead of throwing off some general remarks like others, the reviewer of *The Atlas* preferred to offer a critical analysis of the number.

The reviewer noted "certain wanderings and unsteadiness" which led him to ask whether Dickens was writing the novel with any definite plan or purpose. He did not approve of the change from the third-person narration to the first in Chapter 7 (Number II). This double narrative, he thought, was "hardly artistic," since it interrupted "at a too early period, the nascent interest of the main story." The critic had no doubt that Dickens could "weave skilfully together the isolated threads he is now laying out." But he pointed out that

in an artistic sense he is spreading his web
too wide ere it has assumed the consistency and

¹²⁰*Bell's Life in London*, 11 April 1852, p.8.

¹²¹*The Observer*, 4 April 1852, p.7.

the firmness necessary for the safe endurance of the strain. At a later period of a book the author may safely and frequently change his venue and the branches of his story. In the earlier portions of a tale, pranks of the kind break up the still feeble interest, and distract and confuse the attention.¹²²

To further the plot, as outlined by Dickens in the Number-plans, it was necessary that Lady Dedlock's "place" at Lincolnshire which was slightly introduced in Chapter 2 (Number I) should be described in greater detail in Chapter 7 (Number II) to create an adequate background for the appearance of Mr. Boythorn in Number III. The chapter on "The Law-Writer," which was to appear in Number III, also required that the reader should be reminded of Lady Dedlock, whose fainting at the sight of the law-writer's handwriting seemed mysterious in Chapter 2 (Number I). Since it was only the omniscient narrator who could provide all this information to the reader, Dickens did not violate any artistic principle as the reviewer accused. He was only following a definite plot-sequence by changing to the third-person in Chapter 7.

This plot element made Dickens's method of serialization different from that of earlier serial writers, such as George R. Gleig, David Stewart,

¹²²*The Atlas*, 3 April 1852, p.219.

Michael Scott, and Frederick Marryat, who wrote exciting and sensational serial fiction for *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Metropolitan Magazine* during 1820s and 1830s.¹²³ Instead of simply breaking up a long episodic narrative with some crude suspense at the end of each instalment, Dickens tried to relate one event with another within a pre-conceived structural plan. His critics had already formed the habit of reading his serial novels with the expectation of encountering complex plot situations. But they were not yet ready to appreciate his unique method of double narration within the same instalment. Only one narrative point of view, first-person or third-person, throughout each instalment, would have been more acceptable to contemporary critics.

Although the reviewer of *The Atlas* seemed to have been confused with Dickens's "Spreading of his web too wide" in the Chapter on "The Ghost Walk," readers in general reacted to it rather favourably. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* and *The News of the World* quoted long passages from this chapter. It was mentioned in *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Observer* as one of the most interesting themes.

The Atlas pointed out that Dickens's new serial did not make

¹²³See Schachterle, pp.3-8.

pretensions to any change or novelty in style.

On the contrary, it is more full of the old pure and orthodox Dickensisms than either *Dombey and Son* or *David Copperfield*.

Mr. Dickens has taken again to his minute yet fanciful Dutch style of painting, and to his manner of animating and vivifying all natural phenomenon . . .

The reviewer observed that this style seemed to be quite "charming" in his earlier novels, since it was still new. "They are, in fact, particular freaks of fancy, delightful when new and fresh, but which will not bear over-frequent repetition." He called this a worn-out style, a kind of "mannerism." Like the reviewers of the quarterlies, he lamented the lack of "that warm fancy, that genial humour, and that exquisite appreciation of the ludicrous which constitute so conspicuous features in the mental composition of the author."

The Atlas was very disappointed at Dickens's characterization in Number II. The reviewer felt that the characters were all "greatly overdrawn, and made too palpably grotesque." But he praised Esther, whom he called "the female autobiographer." Though not developed yet, hers was the only character which seemed "natural, even, and winning." The reviewer found her simple beauty and sweet temper "thoroughly womanly and

delicately tender." But, unfortunately, she was surrounded by people who were "mere fleshless and bloodless oddities, and bundles of professional queerness and exaggeration." The lawyers were just wooden figures full of technicalities and nothing human. Dickens's sole purpose was, no doubt, to make them "mere walking repositories of legal dryness and chancery abuses, so as to further the purpose of the tale." Even Miss Flite, represented as a "maniac," was "all exaggerated--all caricatured, and utterly wanting in natural raciness, or that intrinsic element of the semblance, by which we can almost instinctively recognize a character of true flesh and blood."

The character of Miss Flite reminded the reviewer of Poor Peter Peebles in Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*. But "how instinctively true and deeply genuine one feels the latter to be in comparison with the former." In Scott's novel Peebles was also ruined on account of litigation. But while Scott presented him as a natural human being, Dickens made Miss Flite "a freak of fancy got up for the express purpose of hitting at the system and showing its effects." This criticism is interesting when compared with what Lord Jeffrey had said to Dickens only a few years earlier--"You have the force and the nature of Scott in his pathetic parts, without

his occasional coarseness and wordiness."¹²⁴

The reviewer was also critical of Dickens's use of "short sentences without principal verbs" in characterizing Miss Flite, but particularly, Skimpole. "The device," the reviewer said, "is a poor one, for such peculiarities do not make character. They are frequently found united with character, but apart from it they are extremely weak and empty." Consequently, the reviewer did not find anything natural or coherent in Mr. Skimpole's character. "His speeches are more tiresome than anything in Ossian, a style which they sometimes resemble . . . in all this vague, unreal, and absurd tediousness, there is not a particle of nature, and not even the flavour of common sense." The reviewer could not perceive, as later critics did, that Dickens used jerky speech as a device to stress the eccentricities and unspoken thoughts of a character. As Professor Norman Page observes, "a distinctive mode of speech will usually have much to contribute" in the "creation of characters with recognizably individual elements."¹²⁵

But in its review of the final number of *Bleak House*, *The Atlas* revised its earlier opinion. "Miss

¹²⁴Lord Jeffrey's letter to Dickens, 12 September 1847. Quoted in Collins, *The Critical Heritage*, p.218.

¹²⁵Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (London: Longman, 1973), p.92; see also Randolph Quirk, "Some Observations on the Language of Dickens," *Review of English Literature*, 2(1961), 21.

Flite is recognised by all who know the poor old woman who haunts the inns of court," he observed. On Mr. Skimpole, he said:

Skimpole may be somewhat of a caricature, but although it is very seldom that a perfect specimen of his race is to be found, there are few persons of an extensive acquaintance who do not recognise in his portrait features that are unfortunately too characteristic of men they know.

Although the reviewer could not identify what device Dickens used to make the two characters easily recognizable, he could at least see that in their total effect Dickens's characters were very successful.

On Mrs. Jellyby in Number II *The Atlas* was all praise, although this character too, like that of Miss Flite, he thought, was drawn with a "purpose." But the reviewer whole-heartedly approved of Dickens's satiric attack on philanthropic women.

The household, with all the neglected children, is excellently drawn, and in Mr. Dickens's best manner. Nothing can be more vivid or life-like than the portraiture. Slatternism was never put upon paper with so thoroughly genuine an effect. In fact, the household of Jellybys stands out from much that is more vague and unsatisfactory, a perfect miracle of

word-painting.

But the reviewer had one objection; it was too obvious that Mrs. Jellyby seemed more a representation of a system than a living individual, more a "humour" than a character. In contrast, her daughter, Caddy Jellyby, was drawn with "more flesh and blood . . . and genuineness. Her half-smothered indignation and petulance getting the better of good nature and natural affection, are skillfully and truly drawn."¹²⁶

III

"The story does not advance in this number, but it is embellished with much pretty writing, and some pertinent reflections upon subjects relating to the great Chancery suit of Jarndyce." Thus began the review of Number III in *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*.¹²⁷ Other newspapers of May 1852 did not make any mention of Number III. The reason might be, as hinted at by *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, that they did not find any progress in the story in this number.

In Number III, Dickens took up once again the question of public philanthropy, a topic which was to provide him with a theme as important as that of the Chancery reform. In Number I Dickens showed Mrs. Jellyby's philanthropic zeal in the surroundings of her

¹²⁶*The Atlas*, 3 April 1852, p.219.

¹²⁷*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 9 May 1852, p.6.

family, stressing, as Esther pointed out in Chapter 6 (Number II), "it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them." In Chapter 8 (Number III) Dickens gradually expands the theme from a private family issue to a larger public philanthropic concern to encompass within it, what he rightly calls a "Multitude of Sins." By exposing the hypocrisy of Mrs. Pardiggle, whose "business-like systematic" unfriendly attitude towards the brickmakers could not deceive even Esther, Dickens wanted to demonstrate what the England of Tom-all-Alone was in need of--it was not tractarianism as preached by philanthropic missions that was needed, but a genuine social concern as asserted by Esther when she says, "I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; and try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself" (Chapter 8).

This aspect of Dickens's social satire, on private and public philanthropy which begins in Number III, did not, however, draw the reviewers' attention until it enlarged into a controversial contemporary issue during the progress of the next four instalments.

In drawing Number III to a conclusion Dickens adopted a conventional serial technique. Tulkinghorn

was shown to enter the room where the mysterious law-writer was supposed to have been asleep. The number ended with the following passage:

As he rattles on the door, the candle which has drooped so long, goes out, and leaves him in the dark; with the gaunt eyes in the shutters staring down upon the bed.

The narrative was interrupted here at a critical point when the readers' suspense was built up with an intense curiosity to know more about the law-writer and the outcome of his encounter with Tulkinghorn.

In his earlier serial novels, particularly in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens would conclude an instalment of this kind with the following kind of ostentatious comment:

As I propose to show in the sequel whether the white waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint, just yet, whether the life of *Oliver Twist* will be a long or a short piece of biography.

But years of experience had taught him that it was bad art to intrude as a first-person narrator to remind his reader that he must await the sequel to know more about the concluding part of an episode.

The next instalment, Number IV, was reviewed in *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, *The Morning Advertiser*, and *The Weekly Dispatch*. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* did not find any remarkable development in the story.

. . . [There is] scarcely anything that is new so far as regards development of character in the present number; the characters work out the author's purpose so as to keep up the interest for a sufficient number of pages, and there is the same detail, and strength of situation, that is apparent throughout the work.¹²⁸

Other reviewers also agreed that there was hardly anything new in this number.

The Morning Advertiser referred to the concluding part of Number III and said that there was some indication in the last number about Nemo, the law-writer's death. But he pointed out that there was "little or no revelation of his connexion [in Number IV] with the great Jarndyce case."¹²⁹ For Dickens's serial purpose it would have been premature to disclose Nemo's involvement with the major characters so early in the novel. But he tried to sustain the readers' interest in Number IV by providing a chapter on the coroner's inquest. The reviewers of both *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* and *The Weekly Dispatch* found the

¹²⁸*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 20 June 1852, p.6.

¹²⁹*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 June 1852, p.3.

courtroom scene very interesting.¹³⁰

IV

Number V received a very favourable response from the reviewers. *Bell's Life in London*, which did not review Numbers III and IV, declared this number "decidedly an improvement upon the previous number. Some of the touches of character are quite equal to anything Dickens ever wrote."¹³¹ *The Weekly Dispatch* was happy to note that

In this month's number some vague and remote connection begins to be established between the proud and restless Lady of Dedlock and the late tenant of Old Krook, who took himself off without notice, and became the subject of what the poor street-sweeper terms an "inkwitch."¹³²

The Morning Advertiser paid a special tribute to Dickens's serial writing, and made some interesting comments on instalment publications:

The instalment system--however convenient to the purses of thousands of purchasers, and however profitable to publishers by reason of its monthly advertising sheet, the quick return of capital, and the avoidance of the serious

¹³⁰*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 20 June 1852, p.6; *The Weekly Dispatch*, 13 June 1852, p.374.

¹³¹*Bell's Life in London*, 11 July 1852, p.3.

¹³²*The Weekly Dispatch*, 4 July 1852, p.422.

and ruinous mistake of overprinting stock of a book which, purchased, may never sell according either to its merits or their own sanguine calculations is by no means conducive to a fair estimate of the ability of a fiction-writer, or the coherence and construction of his story. Nor is its effort less injurious on the author, who is thus called on for a series of spasmodic efforts at fixed intervals, rather than the performance of continuous and homogenous work, in which the due proportion of its parts shall be symmetrically contrived. Each month must furnish its thirty-two pages of story, including its couple of "events," "points," or a catastrophe; the said narrative being inexorably placed for twelve or twenty times on the Procrustean bed of monthly subdivision. With this reservation in favour of Mr. Dickens, Part V, containing chapters XIV, XV, and XVI of *Bleak House*, are excellent portions of a most excellent work.¹³³

From his experience, Dickens knew that he could not hold the interest of his readers with thirty-two pages of "dull" material continuously for several months together. They were bound to react unfavourably, and in consequence sales would drop. This might not be

¹³³*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 July 1852, p.3.

the case in a modern serial fiction, because a magazine today tries to sustain readership-interest in each of its issues by providing a variety of "departments" - short-stories, poems, current affairs, fashion, films and theatre, and essays on popular current topics. But Dickens's monthly parts did not contain any other feature besides the text of the particular serial and some pages of advertisements. His reputation ensured the sales of his serials, no doubt. As Robert L. Patten's study indicates, "the popular success of *Bleak House*, measured by sales rather than reviews, was markedly greater than that of any of the monthly serials written during the 1840s."¹³⁴ But the sales of the monthly serials would have fluctuated, as they did in the case of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, if Dickens had not been sufficiently careful in the planning of the earlier parts of his novel.

Dickens took great care in keeping up the interest of his readers in the first half of his serials. Years earlier, in terminating the serialization of *Master Humphrey's Clock* in 1841, he had said:

Many passages in a tale of any length, depend materially for their interest on the intimate relation they bear to what has gone before, and to what is to follow. I have sometimes found it difficult when I issued thirty-two closely

¹³⁴Patten, p.216.

printed pages once a month, to sustain in your minds this needful connection: in the present form of publication it is often, especially in the first half of the story, quite impossible to preserve it sufficiently through the current numbers.

Master Humphrey's Clock was published in weekly serial parts; but the difficulties of unfolding relationships between parts were those he had almost equally felt in monthly serialization.

In the first half of the novel Dickens had to introduce and develop new characters and events, and establish interrelationships between instalments, always keeping an eye on the central issues. He achieved this purpose successfully by choosing certain significant points in the serial structure for special focus.

The opening instalment was one such point of focus; it set the story in motion by introducing the dominant themes and characters, and, as I have pointed out, Dickens took every care to see that the opening number of *Bleak House* was well received by his readers. According to William Axton, another significant point in Dickens's serial structure was an instalment in the

middle of the novel, usually the tenth instalment.¹³⁵ Following Axton's argument, Lance Schatchterle concentrates on the tenth number of *Bleak House* for a special analysis of Dickens's serial techniques, maintaining that this number "assessed by the multiplicity of its tones and techniques, is almost a novel in little."¹³⁶ An examination of a few representative novels like *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* show that in the middle of Dickens's novels there is a point of crucial action which serves to "tie together the threads of plot and imagery developed from their introduction in the first number."¹³⁷

But it has to be remembered that Dickens had also to attend to the serial readers' interest during the progress of the novel from Number II to the mid-point. Dickens achieved this purpose by relying on a plot sequence which gradually developed with the introduction of new characters and events in each instalment. This method required at least one more key instalment, between the opening and the mid-point, to provide an adequate acceleration to the story, and to

¹³⁵William Axton, "'Keystone' Structure in Dickens' Serial Novels," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 37 (1965), 34.

¹³⁶Schatchterle, "*Bleak House* as a Serial Novel," p.217.

¹³⁷Axton, p.34.

insure that readership-interest would continue steadily to the end. The introduction of Sam Weller in Number IV of *Pickwick Papers*,¹³⁸ Mr. Brownlow's rescue of Oliver from Mr. Fang in Number V of *Oliver Twist*, and Nicholas's beating of Squeers in Number IV of *Nicholas Nickleby* serve this catalytic purpose. The need for such an instalment was more strongly felt in *Martin Chuzzlewit* when the sale of its earlier numbers began to drop drastically. Dickens succeeded in saving the situation partially by sending Martin to America in Number V. The sales improved, but Dickens was severely criticized by later critics for his artistic failure in the novel.

From *Dombey and Son* onward, when he made it his practice to write Number-plans to guide him during the progress of serialization, Dickens made it part of his design to have a key number somewhere between Number I and Number X. His letter to Forster, written after he had finished Chapter 1 of *Dombey and Son*, indicates that Paul's death, which was to bring tears to thousands of readers, was planned well ahead of time to occur in Number V.¹³⁹ The Number-plans for *David Copperfield* show that David was to "run away to Aunt

¹³⁸*Pickwick Papers*, however, saw its triumph from Number V, when at the suggestion of William Jerdan, who had reviewed Number IV in *Literary Gazette*, Dickens exerted his utmost to make Sam Weller as striking as possible. See Johnson, I, 149.

¹³⁹See Butt and Tillotson, pp.95-100.

Betsy in Number IV (Chapter 12), and he was to "make another beginning" with new people in Number V, (Chapter 15).¹⁴⁰ In *Bleak House* also, Number V happened to be a crucial point in serial structure. The response was, as Dickens could have expected, very encouraging.

Number V concerned itself with all the major themes introduced in Number I--Chancery injustice, Mrs. Jellyby's foreign philanthropy and the upper-class world of the Dedlocks. In addition, the readers had some insight into the grim realities of the England of Tom-all Alone's represented by Jo and the brickmakers' family.

Of the three chapters in Number V, Chapter 14 dealt mainly with the Jellybys. The readers were amused with another description of Mrs. Jellyby's mission, circulars, and as Caddy Jellyby said, "bills, dirt, waste, noise, tumbles down-stairs, confusion, and wretchedness . . . scrambling home . . . like one great washing day--only nothing's washed!"

The dramatic interest of the chapter centred on Caddy Jellyby, who, neglected and exploited, revolted against her mother and expressed her determination to marry the person of her choice. *The Morning Advertiser* said:

Caddy is introduced in a new phase: tired of

¹⁴⁰See Number-plans for *David Copperfield* in Butt and Tillotson, pp.127-29.

her mother's patronage of the "Settlement of Borrioboola Gha," and the eternal directing of circulars of the "East London Branch Aid Ramification," and averse, as well the poor girl may be, to marrying "a philanthropist," in the person of Mr. Quale, she has fallen in love, on her own account, with Prince Turveydrop, a young dancing master, and son of a teacher of "Deportment."¹⁴¹

The readers' interest was also heightened by the introduction of Old Turveydrop. The reviewers found this character very engaging. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* said,

Poor Caddy Jellyby, who has found a lover in a young dancing master, Mr. Prince Turveydrop, occupies some agreeable papers [?], and there is a fine full-length description of the dancing master's father, a fellow who prides himself upon his figure and "deportment," and lives upon his family.¹⁴²

The Weekly Dispatch quoted only one passage from the number, and it was a selection from the chapter on "Deportment."¹⁴³ *The Observer* made a special mention of the chapter showing some of the peculiarities of the character of Old Turveydrop--"a fat old gent with a

¹⁴¹*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 July 1852, p.3.

¹⁴²*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 11 July 1852, p.6.

¹⁴³*The Weekly Dispatch*, 4 July 1852, p.422.

false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig, who dressed so tight that, when he bowed, creases came into the whites of his eyes."¹⁴⁴

The first few pages of Chapter 15 were devoted to the theme of the foreign philanthropy of Mrs. Pardiggle and her many great missions. But the major part of the chapter was given to Charley's plight as an orphan and Mr. Gridley's misery on account of a Chancery suit. Recalling the earlier appearance of Gridley in Chapter 1, *The Morning Advertiser* referred to the sad woeful condition of the litigant, and to

his wrongs by that felonious tribe called equity lawyers, and the monster iniquity of which they are the nefarious workers. Poor Gridley, for that is his name, has indeed a horrid, yet not uncommon, tale of ruin and madness, of robbery and poverty, to tell, and impressively it is sustained.¹⁴⁵

But the reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was not much impressed. He criticized Dickens for "much sameness in the details of the Chancery misery," but then he thought that Dickens had a peculiar power to "arouse his readers with a novel remark or touch of nature such as only himself is capable of." The reviewer also referred to the Charley episode which he

¹⁴⁴*The Observer*, 4 July 1852, p.7.

¹⁴⁵*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 July 1852, p.3.

thought would definitely "draw tears from the eyes of fair readers."¹⁴⁶

The Morning Advertiser was specially touched by Charley's plight and remarked that the kindnesses of fat Chandler's shopwoman, Mrs. Blinder, and other neighbours towards Charley and her brother and sister "are the testimony of kindness and genius to the inherent goodness of much-maligned human nature."¹⁴⁷

The key chapter in Number V was "Tom-all Alone's." Dickens raised a very pertinent question in this chapter: "What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step?" The "connexion" had already been clearly worked out--in Chapter 1 of the opening instalment the Court of Chancery was presented as a breeding centre of

decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard.

The foul and decaying tenements where the crossing-sweeper Jo lived, were attached to the Court of Chancery on account of the unsettled suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The link between Lady Dedlock

¹⁴⁶*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 11 July 1852, p.6.

¹⁴⁷*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 July 1852, p.3.

and the Court of Chancery had already been established and partly developed in Chapter 2, but the connection of the two with Tom-all-Alone's was spelt out clearly for the first time in Chapter 16.

In Number V Dickens also provided, as *The Weekly Dispatch* pointed out, some clues to Lady Dedlock's possible relationship with the law-writer, earlier hinted at in Number I. The description of a visit of a lady in a veil to the graveyard and to Krook's lodging served as a high point of interest to serial readers. "Who this lady is who seeks the suicide's grave the reader can guess," *The Morning Advertiser* noted.¹⁴⁸ To the reviewer of *The Observer* the scene was "quite melodramatic in its grim tragedy."¹⁴⁹ *The Weekly Dispatch* was highly impressed:

The chapter descriptive of her visiting the several places in which he lived, terminating with the revolting golgotha where his long aching head lay at rest, is as suggestive as it is fine in its dreamy yet dreary picturesqueness."¹⁵⁰

V

Serial writing placed its author in a peculiar position

¹⁴⁸*The Morning Advertiser*, 3 July 1852, p.3.

¹⁴⁹*The Observer*, 4 July 1852, p.7.

¹⁵⁰*The Weekly Dispatch*, 4 July 1852, p.6.

in relation to his readers--he must either command full control of his readers or be at the mercy of their mood which varied according to interest created in each instalment. As can be seen from the following pages, the readership-interest in *Bleak House* fell off considerably during the progress of Numbers VI and VII. If Dickens had not provided his readers with the key instalment Number V with all the crucial developments of events and characters, with suggestions for further scandalous exposure of Lady Dedlock's affair in later parts, *Bleak House* could possibly have met the fate of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. *The Magnet* declared Number VI as "dull" and said, "People come and go out whom we do not care to remember and have no particular desire to meet again."¹⁵¹ *The Morning Advertiser* and *The Weekly Dispatch* did not bring out any review of these numbers. *Bell's Life in London* was disappointed to note that in Number VI the story did not "advance the plot at all."¹⁵² Regarding Number VII the reviewer complained that "we read little or nothing of the principal characters of the story."¹⁵³ *The Morning Chronicle* did not review Number VI. On Number VII its reviewer said, "We do not exactly see the progress of the

¹⁵¹*The Magnet*, 9 August 1852, p.6.

¹⁵²*Bell's Life in London*, 22 August 1852, p.8.

¹⁵³*Bell's Life in London*, 19 September 1852, p.8.

story . . ."¹⁵⁴

If such comments represented the response of serial readers in general, the impact could certainly be felt in the drop in the sale of the serial parts, a fact which perturbed Dickens most, and as a consequence, adversely affected his art. It was under such circumstances, as it happened in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, that Dickens suddenly introduced something sensational at the cost of sacrificing the organic unity of his novel. Fortunately, this could not happen in *Bleak House* because of Dickens's careful strategy in structuring Number V. It is true that the readers felt a dullness in Numbers VI and VII; but that did not affect the sale of the serial. With the interest and suspense Dickens had created in the fifth instalment, he could safely carry on until he reached another crucial stage in Number IX.

Dickens's reviewers had reason to complain about Numbers VI and VII, for nothing very striking happened in the six long chapters of these numbers. Some pages were given to Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger, who, as *The Magnet* remarked, "make no impression." The reviewer could guess that Mr. Allan Woodcourt was to be Esther's lover. But he appeared to be

a rather dull young man, who is brought in only
that we may be told that he is going to India,

¹⁵⁴*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1852, p.6.

and that he has a mother who comes from Wales and who "had had, a long time ago, an eminent person for an ancestor . . . a sort of Royal Family."¹⁵⁵

Esther's first encounter with Lady Dedlock, her mother, in Chapter 19, arouses curiosity in those who read the novel in volume form. But the original readers of the serial instalment did not find it equally interesting. "Lady Dedlock, a proud woman of fashion, is well-sketched," was the only comment the reviewer of *The Magnet* made. *Bell's Life in London* came out with some very curious guess-work about Esther's identity:

It [Number VI] contains touching the heroine, Esther Summerson, one revelation, viz, that that delightful creature is the niece of Lady Dedlock, and left-handed offspring of an erring sister of her ladyship's.¹⁵⁶

When *Bleak House* Number VII appeared in September 1852, the readers noticed with surprise that the principal characters were not present in that particular instalment. According to the convention of serial writing, the readers would expect the presence of the major characters in each of the instalments. That Dickens could disregard this convention of an artificial requirement, and insist on a natural

¹⁵⁵*The Magnet*, 9 August 1852, p.6.

¹⁵⁶*Bell's Life in London*, 22 August 1852, p.8.

artistic development of the plot, was a great feat in itself. Although the reviewer of *The Magnet* thought that the "tale appears to halt in this number," he could at least see why Dickens was interested only in minor characters in Number VII. He pointed out that probably Dickens wanted to "bring in some additional characters and describe them at full length."¹⁵⁷ That was exactly what Dickens had in mind when he was planning this number.

Dickens's Number-plan for this part had a unique entry: "Memo--for future / Mr. Tulkinghorn finds Joe--hearing from Mr. Snagsby what he said there--and gets him to identify Lady Dedlock/ Tony Jobling in his lodging, mistaken for the dead lodger / Has Lady Dedlock's picture among the Galaxy Gallery."

Dickens used the first part of this Number-plan immediately in Chapter 22 where Jo's mistaken identification of the veiled figure of Hortense as the lady he had escorted to the graveyard and to Nemo's lodging confirmed Tulkinghorn's suspicion about Lady Dedlock's past. But the second part of the Number-plan anticipates events that occur three months later in the tenth number in December 1852. "Tony Jobling in his lodging, mistaken for the dead lodger" foreshadows a scene in Chapter 32 (Number X). During his after-supper stroll, Snagsby feels an irresistible urge to visit

¹⁵⁷*The Magnet*, 13 September 1852, p.6.

Krook's rag and bottle shop. He encounters Mr. Weevle alias Tony Jobling, who, for some mysterious reasons, is in a restless condition himself. Mr. Snagsby finds a curious parallel between Mr. Weevle's situation and that of the dead lodger, and suggests, 'Seems a fate in it, don't there?' and suddenly hastens towards home as if chased by the ghost of Nemo.

The last point in the Number-plan, "Has Lady Dedlock's picture among the Galaxy Gallery," also finds a fuller expression in the same Chapter 32. Immediately after Snagsby's departure, Guppy arrives at Weevle's lodging. He looks round the room at the "Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty" and is suddenly struck by the

portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantleshelf,
in which she is represented on a terrace, with
a pedestal upon the terrace . . .

"That's very like Lady Dedlock. . . . It's
a speaking likeness."

It is to be noted that Dickens describes the Galaxy Gallery in Chapter 20 as Mr. Weevle's most prized possession, but the inclusion of Lady Dedlock in it is held until Chapter 32. Moreover, Dickens does not allow this point to develop further until he reaches Chapter 40 of Number XIII. Guppy, while helping Weevle to move out of Krook's lodging in Chapter 40, is seen to be collecting the "Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty" into a bandbox. Mr. Tulkinghorn, who is also present,

happens to see the particular portrait this time, and exclaims, "Who is this? 'Lady Dedlock.' Ha! A very good likeness in its way, but it wants force of character." Because of this advance planning, Dickens was successful in engaging the attention of the instalment readers even with minor characters; unlike the earlier serial writers he did not have to manipulate the appearance of the central character or the story-teller in each instalment just for the sake of continuity.¹⁵⁸

While the Number-plans and their functions in the organic structure of the serial show Dickens's firm control of narrative development, the responses he received from the monthly reviews indicate that he was no less successful in engaging the attention of the instalment readers even with minor characters. As the reviewer of *Bell's Life in London* observed:

The character of Mr. Guppy is very amusingly developed. The description of the Smallweed family is a novelty. The dinner at a "slapbang" shop given by Guppy to young Smallweed and Mr. Jobling is a picture of real life.¹⁵⁹

Bell's Life in London was not alone in such praises.

The Observer agreed that the "new lodger," Mr. Jobling,

¹⁵⁸Serial stories in *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Metropolitan Magazine* and *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities* were characterized by this common feature. Dickens himself tried the same convention in writing a series of sketches with a common story-teller in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. See Schachtlerle, p.3.

¹⁵⁹*Bell's Life in London*, 19 September 1852, p.8.

"promises to turn out an amusing character."¹⁶⁰ *The Magnet* thought that the portrayal of the Smallweed family was "powerfully and, perhaps truthfully drawn."¹⁶¹ *The Morning Chronicle* was particularly fascinated by

the capital scene of lawyer's clerk life, the diners being the love-lorn Mr. Guppy, a junior of his, and a new, and rather seedy acquaintance, a Mr. Jobling.¹⁶²

Dickens's trump-card for Number VII, however, was the introduction of a new character, Mr. Bucket.¹⁶³ The character of a police inspector was already familiar to Dickens's readers. *The Morning Chronicle* said,

We find among the new characters, one of a detective officer, Mr. Bucket, which evinces a new study of the original article, a subject on which Mr. Dickens has already written and capitally.¹⁶⁴

Several articles recounting how a detective called Inspector Wiold worked under the newly-formed Metropolitan Police Force, had appeared in *Household*

¹⁶⁰*The Observer*, 5 September 1852, p.7.

¹⁶¹*The Magnet*, 13 September 1852, p.6.

¹⁶²*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1852, p.6.

¹⁶³"Dickens was the first major publicist for the police detective." Ian Ousby, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction From Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 140. In American fiction Poe had introduced a French detective inspector much earlier.

¹⁶⁴*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1852, p.6.

Words in 1850-1851. Inspector Bucket was, therefore, easily recognized as the counterpart of Inspector Wield.¹⁶⁵

Inspector Bucket's character was based on a real-life detective, Charles Frederick Field, who had been a guest at several *Household Words* dinners.¹⁶⁶ But when *The Times* of 17 September 1853 credited Dickens with making "much use of Field's experiences in Inspector Bucket, of *Bleak House*," Dickens replied:

I observe two statements from a country paper, copied into your columns of Saturday last, and therefore made important. They represent me as having availed myself of the experiences of that excellent officer, Mr. Inspector Field, in *Bleak House* and also as having undertaken to write the said excellent officer's biography. Allow me to assure you that amidst all the news in the Times, I found nothing more entirely and completely new to me than these two pieces of

¹⁶⁵ See the following articles in *Household Words*: "The Modern Science of Thief-Taking" (13 July 1850), "A Detective Police Party" (27 July 1850 and 10 August 1850), "Three Detective Anecdotes" (14 September 1850), "Disappearances" (7 June 1851), "On Duty with Inspector Field" (14 June 1851). In the first article the detective was given no name. In the subsequent articles, excepting the last one, he appeared as Inspector Wield.

¹⁶⁶ See Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p.206.

intelligence.¹⁶⁷

Disingenuous though he may appear, I think Dickens was more concerned here about Inspector Field's privacy than the actual truth.

VI

In September 1852, *The Standard* published Lord Denman's long review of *Bleak House* Numbers I to VII referred to earlier. This review was published as a pamphlet on 29 November 1852, the same day *The Times* reported a meeting of ladies convened by the Duchess of Sutherland at Strafford House to consider sending a memorial to the women of the United States from the women of England on the subject of slavery. Both the pamphlet and the meeting had drawn the name of Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* to the attention of English public in a way which must have caused embarrassment and distress to the author of the novel.

The Standard review began with a scathing attack on Dickens:

Mr. Dickens is perhaps the greatest favourite that the public ever had. Like other favourites he is in some danger of being spoiled. His present romance, though as wonderfully rich as any of his former in observations on life and

¹⁶⁷*Nonesuch*, II, 490. For full discussion of this point see Collins, *Dickens and Crime*, pp.206-11, and Butt and Tillotson, pp.196-98.

character, has some of his old faults in an aggravated form, and some which have not appeared before. His story is, as usual, inartificial; his mysteries perplex much more than they interest; his love of low life seems to grow upon him. We are detained too long in filthy corners, and surprised too unceremoniously at finding the delicacy of virtuous sentiment in the lowest depths of human degradation.¹⁶⁸

This stinging criticism was prompted by Dickens's satire of Mrs. Jellyby and her foreign mission in *Bleak House* Numbers I, II, and VI. Lord Denman did not deny that women like Mrs. Jellyby existed; but he vehemently objected to Dickens's implication that she was representative of the entire class of missionary reformers. He said:

In one particular instance, but the most important of all at this crisis, he exerts his powers to obstruct the great cause of human improvement--that cause which in general he cordially advocates. He does his best to replunge the world into the most barbarous abuse that ever afflicted it. We do not say that he actually defends slavery or the slave trade, but he takes pains to discourage, by

¹⁶⁸*The Standard*, 13 September 1852, [p.3].

ridicule, the effort now making to put them down. We believe indeed, that in general terms he expresses just hatred for both; but so do all those who profit or wish to profit by them, and who, by that general profession, prevent the detail of particulars too atrocious to be endured. The disgusting picture of a woman who pretends zeal for the happiness of Africa, and is constantly employed in securing a life of misery to her own children, is a laboured work of art in his present exhibition. It may possibly be the Daguerrotype portrait of some disagreeable and boring formal Pharisee with whom Mr. Dickens may have the misfortune to be acquainted.¹⁶⁹

There is no proof that Dickens had seen the earlier *Standard* review of *Bleak House*, and it is likely that he became aware of Lord Denman's censure of the character of Mrs. Jellyby only after he had read the pamphlet on "*Uncle Tom's Cabin, Bleak House, Slavery and Slave Trade.*" In his letter to Mrs. Cropper, Lord Denman's daughter, Dickens mentions "the pamphlet" and not any *Standard* article of particular dates.¹⁷⁰ Had Dickens known about this article and its authorship, it seems unlikely that he would remain

¹⁶⁹*The Standard*, 13 September 1852, [p.3]

¹⁷⁰See Stone, p.195.

quiet, the more so when we take into account the trouble he took to defend himself to a stranger who had written to him criticizing his satire of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in Chapter 16 of *Bleak House* Number V.¹⁷¹

But in November-December 1852 things happened quite differently, to some extent as if to justify Lord Denman's accusation that Dickens was obstructing the "great cause of human improvement" by portraying a "disgusting picture of a woman who pretends zeal for the happiness of Africa, and is constantly employed in securing a life of misery to her own children."¹⁷²

Uncle Tom's Cabin had taken by storm the attention of the reading public in England.¹⁷³ It had aroused the conscience of many philanthropists in England, notably of Lord Denman and Lord Shaftesbury, who were agitated over the question of slavery in America. But owing to the apprehension that any active support of the anti-slavery movement in England might be interpreted

¹⁷¹The correspondent asked, "Do the supporters of Christian missions to the heathen really deserve the attack that is conveyed in the sentence about Jo seated in his anguish on the doorstep of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts? The allusion is severe, but is it just? Are such boys as Jo neglected? What are ragged schools, town missions, and many of those societies I regret to see sneered at in the last number of *Bleak House*?" For Dickens's reply, see *Nonesuch*, II, 401.

¹⁷²[Lord Denman] *The Standard*, 13 September 1852.

¹⁷³Several editions of the novel were published in England during 1852-1853. Its sale far exceeded that of *Bleak House*.

as politically motivated, they expressed their deeply-felt sentiment in different ways. Lord Denman was so moved with pity that he would do anything to support the cause of the philanthropists. When he found that Dickens was satirizing the foreign missionaries in *Bleak House*, he reacted sharply. First he wrote *The Standard* review anonymously. Finding that it did not have the effect he desired, he went a step further and published the whole review as a pamphlet under his signature. On the other hand, Lord Shaftesbury felt that it was impossible for him to remain quiet after public feeling was stirred to its depths on reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel. "Determined to draw up an address," he wrote in his diary of 6 November 1852, "from the Women of England to the Women of America, and try to stir their souls and sympathies. Did it, and sent it off to the newspapers of to day."¹⁷⁴

The proposed address was published in *The Times* of 9 November 1852. But Lord Shaftesbury needed to ensure that it was taken up by some women of importance, circulated to enlist as many signatures as possible, and then transmitted to America to "produce a deep and fruitful impression."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, K.G.II, 395.

¹⁷⁵The "Address" was entitled "The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of the Women of England to their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America." It was signed by 500,000 women and was finally sent to America sometime in the middle of

He succeeded in persuading Lady Sutherland, who called an eventful meeting at Strafford House on 26 November. The meeting was attended by ladies mostly from aristocratic families, with two notable exceptions, however--Mrs. Tennyson and Mrs. Dickens. They were all perturbed by the picture of atrocities in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of moral and physical sufferings inflicted on the negroes and their descendants by the system of slavery prevalent in many parts of America, and readily agreed "to move, to resolve, to form committees and sub-committees, and to engage offices and a secretary" for the purpose of collecting signatures on the memorial address.¹⁷⁶ The meeting was widely reported in the newspapers and periodicals at the time.

Dickens was not the only writer satirizing the recent tendencies of the "Women of England" to indulge in extremes of philanthropic concern for sufferings in distant overseas countries at the cost of home missions. In *Sybil*, Disraeli pointed out:

Infanticide is practised as extensively and as legally in England as it is on the banks of the Ganges; a circumstance which apparently has not yet engaged the attention of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

¹⁷⁵ (cont'd) 1853.

¹⁷⁶ *The Times*, 2 December 1852, p.6.

Parts.¹⁷⁷

But it was the picture of Mrs. Jellyby and her "telescopic philanthropy" that occurred to the contemporaries most readily when they started talking about this women's campaign. One correspondent, who signed himself "Common Sense", wrote to the editor of *The Times* of 2 December 1852:

Such wide, comprehensive, and shadowy "missions" ought to be left, Sir, to Mrs. Jellyby and her friend, the enthusiastic Guster[?]. The women of England, if they really seek for the hard work of benevolence, can find plenty of it within a stone's throw of their own dwellings, no matter where they dwell.

Three days later a leading article appeared in *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* (5 December 1852) under the heading "Mrs. Jellyby at Strafford House." The writer of the article began:

Mrs. Jellyby has read with great emotion the details of African slavery, which Mrs. Stowe has given in her novel of "Uncle Tom." *Mrs. Jellyby*, whose emotions are always ready at the call of distress and sufferings at Borrioboola Gha, and other distant places, cannot conceal those emotions on the present occasion.

The writer ridiculed the active sympathy excited by the

¹⁷⁷Disraeli, p.121.

perusal of an American fiction, whereas no authentic story could ever move any of these ladies into action before. It was surprisng, the writer observed, that while these Duchesses, Marchionesses and other ladies of rank and distinction reddened their eyes with weeping over the misfortunes of the fictional characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they never spared one tear for the miserable conditions of governesses they employed to educate their children.

There are worse sorrows within a circle of five miles round Strafford House, where the Duchess of Sutherland has so feelingly expressed herself concerning the blacks, than all the *Elizas* and *Cassys* in the United States could furnish.

If English governesses could engage a popular writer, the article pointed out, to write a 'strong novel' on the subject of their sufferings, or if the English milliners could prevail upon dramatists like Bulwer or Buckstone to portray the cruelties of the system, then perhaps there might be an effective movement in their favour.

Dickens's own opinion on the question of foreign missions did not differ from those expressed above. "I am decidedly of opinion," he said in his reply to his critic of *Bleak House* Number V, "that the two works, the home and the foreign, are not conducted with an

equal hand, and that the home claim is by far the stronger and the more pressing of the two."¹⁷⁸ Dickens retorted much more strongly in another satire on Foreign Missions in Chapter 30 of *Bleak House* Number X where, quite ironically, he says that the mission of the philanthropist Miss Wisk was

to show the world that woman's mission was man's mission and that the only genuine mission of both men and women was to be always moving declaratory resolutions about things in general at public meetings. . . . Such a mean mission as the domestic mission, was the very last thing to be endured among them; indeed, Miss Wisk informed us, with great indignation, before we sat down to breakfast, that the idea of women's mission lying chiefly in the narrow sphere of Home was an outrageous slander on the part of her tyrant, Man.

The response to such a passage was immediate. It was an attack not only on the philanthropic role of women but also on the question of women's rights. Both were public topics in 1851-52.

Most Victorians were opposed to the idea of women's emancipation. *Punch* had brought out several

¹⁷⁸ *Nonesuch*, II, 401.

caricatures on Bloomerism in 1851.¹⁷⁹ "Sucking Pigs" in *Household Words* was an article Dickens himself had published that very year on the same issue.¹⁸⁰ It was, however, in *Bleak House* that the satire on women seemed most biting. As Mrs. Tillotson remarks, "in no other novel does Dickens make so much play with female emancipation and female management."¹⁸¹ This explains why Dickens's contemporaries responded so enthusiastically to the characterization of Mrs. Jellyby. But the portrayal also drew harsh criticism from philanthropists like Lord Denman and feminists like John Stuart Mill.¹⁸²

It was not, however, Dickens's intention to cause any damage to an "existing cause" advocated by persons in whose earnestness he had faith (whether he agreed with the cause or not was a different question). Lord Denman was sincerely devoted to his many reforming activities; he was an old friend and admirer of Dickens. So was Lord Shaftesbury, "whose earnestness in all good works," Dickens had said at a recent public

¹⁷⁹Opposition to the activities of militant women who demanded equal opportunities in voting and employment came to be known as Bloomerism. See Ellen Moers, "*Bleak House: The Agitating Women*," *Dickensian* 69(1973), 13-24 and Norris Pope, *Dickens and Charity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp.139-42.

¹⁸⁰*Household Words*, 8 November 1851, pp.145-47.

¹⁸¹Butt and Tillotson, pp.193-96.

¹⁸²In his letter to Harriet Taylor, Mill referred to Dickens as "That creature" who had ridiculed "the rights of women . . . in the vulgarest way." John Stuart Mill to Harriet Taylor, 20 March 1854, reprinted in Collins, *Critical Heritage*, pp.296-97.

meeting, "no man can doubt, and who always has the courage to face the worst and commonest of all cant; that is to say, the cant about the cant of philanthropy and benevolence."¹⁸³ It is, therefore, possible that Dickens felt embarrassed and uneasy at the reference to Mrs. Jellyby in the context of the general ridicule of the Strafford House movement. This might be the reason why, despite Lord Denman's pungent attacks, Dickens preferred to remain silent.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³K.J. Fielding, ed. *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p.132, 10 May 1851. Hereafter cited as *Speeches*.

¹⁸⁴But in private Dickens defended his position in a long letter of 20 December 1852 to Mrs. Cropper, Lord Denman's daughter. He wrote: "Mrs. Jellyby gives offence merely because the word 'Africa', is unfortunately associated with her wild Hobby. No kind of reference to slavery is made or intended, in that connexion. It must be obvious to anyone who reads about her. *But, lest I should unintentionally damage any existing cause, I invent the cause of emigration to Africa. Which no one in reality is advocating. Which no one ever did, that ever I heard of. Which has as much to do, in any conceivable way with the unhappy Negro slave as with the stars.*" Stone, p.195 [italics mine].

IV. The Middle Numbers

I

In this chapter I propose to discuss Numbers VIII through XII. These numbers, as I should like to demonstrate, constitute the crucial middle section of *Bleak House*. The serial takes a definite turn in Number VIII and sustains a continued readership interest until it reaches a climactic point in Number XII.

When *Bleak House* Number VIII appeared in October 1852, it was greeted by *Bell's Life in London* as "unquestionably one of the best that have appeared." In its earlier reviews, this critic sounded a note of warning that there was no advancement of the plot in Number VI, and "little or nothing of the principal characters" in Number VII. But in Number VIII, the interest of the tale was once again heightened. "All the principal characters hitherto introduced are well developed" in this number. The critic was happy to find that Mr. Jarndyce, for once, could "abandon his over-pliant disposition" and be severe in separating the loving cousins and ask them to wait for "better times." He praised the characterization of Mr. George Rouncewell and Mr. Turveydrop as "capital"; but he was not happy with Esther Summerson. "In some instances Esther and her friend [Caddy] are really too angelic,

too good for this world."

The reviewer also referred to the episode of Gridley's death in Chapter 24. "This death is well managed," he said, "as a practical and deadly exposition of the law's delay . . . of making a fresh and furious attack on the Court of Chancery."¹⁸⁵ In his Preface to *Bleak House*, written in August 1853, Dickens made particular mention of Gridley's plight as a victim of the Court of Chancery. He assured his readers that "the case of Gridley is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end."

A case like Gridley's was so common in 1852-1853 that there was no need for any assurance from the author about its authenticity. As the reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* pointed out,

There is so much literal truth in these passages, and of such an everyday character, that the reader will not feel greatly interested in them. But they betoken, nevertheless, abuses of so grievous a nature, that they ought long since to have been

¹⁸⁵*Bell's Life in London*, 10 October 1852, p.2.

rectified altogether.¹⁸⁶

In Number VIII, Dickens simply concentrated on developing the themes already introduced in earlier numbers: Esther's visit to Mr. Boythorn's in Lincolnshire, the Chancery theme, Richard's plight, and Mr. Bucket's pursuit of Gridley. But he made these episodes interesting, and his readers enjoyed reading the number.

In the next instalment, Dickens heightened the readers' interest by revealing the relationship between Esther and Lady Dedlock. Commenting on this new turn of events in the story, *The Morning Advertiser* said:

We may guess from the conclusion of the following chapter (29), where the story sounds its key-note in Lady Dedlock's exclamation after an interview with young Mr. Guppy, relative to the mysterious man who died in poverty at Mrs. Blinder's. From this no doubt is left that the said defunct "Nemo" was Captain Hawdon; that he was the husband of Lady Dedlock; and that it is to Esther Summerson--really Esther Hawdon--that the miserable mother applies her bitter adjuration--when Guppy has departed--"Oh God! Esther! my child! my child!"

The reviewer wondered whether it was a "premature

¹⁸⁶*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 3 October 1852, p.6.

denouement." If so, how could the author continue to interest his readers after this revelation? But the reviewer felt confident that a "versatile" writer like Dickens could not fail his readers.¹⁸⁷

Bell's New Weekly Messenger, however, was not happy with the progress of the story in Number IX. The reviewer objected to the discursive and rambling character of the serial. He said:

A good storyteller should so connect his episodes that not one is lost sight of whilst the narrative is in progress; but so long does Mr. Dickens leave his personages in the various rooms and corners of *Bleak House*, that some of them are nearly forgotten when he brings them out again to renew the interest in their adventures.¹⁸⁸

This negative reaction was probably owing to the absence of 'curtains,' a device followed by popular serial writers of the time.¹⁸⁹ But, unlike others, Dickens did not feel it necessary to provide his readers with a sensational 'curtain' as the climax of each number. For example, Number VIII does not end with an intriguing situation involving a principal

¹⁸⁷*The Morning Advertiser*, 2 November 1852, p.6.

¹⁸⁸*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 7 November 1852, p.6.

¹⁸⁹This device required that each instalment start as if with the rising of the curtain and come to an end with its droppings. See Michael Joseph and Martin Cumberland, *How to Write Serial Fiction* (1928), p.79.

character. Instead, the last chapter (25) of this number ends with a touch of humour in Mrs. Snagsby's suspicion of her husband's relationship with Jo.

Similarly, the first chapter (26) of Number X does not continue either with the events or with the characters mentioned in the preceding number. After an introductory paragraph on Leicester Square and its doubtful characters, Dickens takes up some minor characters like Mr. George Rouncewell and his assistant Phil Squod. This was probably the reason why the reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* failed to find any link between Numbers IX and X. He remarked, "It might almost be said of the work, that 'every number is complete in itself,' so imperfectly are the incidents linked together."¹⁹⁰ But the link between the two numbers, though not apparent, is not totally absent. Dickens establishes a subtle transition; a careful reader will notice that the characters and situations--Mr. Bucket, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. George Rouncewell, Gridley's death--continue to be the central concern of Number IX and the following numbers.

Dickens was now in the mid-point of *Bleak House*; at this stage he was particularly careful in showing his readers, as he said, "the conduct of my stories, the elucidation of my meaning, and the gradual

¹⁹⁰*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 7 November 1852, p.6.

development of my characters."¹⁹¹ This helped his readers to grasp the action and themes presented in a desultory manner in the first half of the story. A passage from the review of Number IX in *The Weekly News and Chronicle* indicates that the feeling was reciprocal: Dickens's serial readers also felt that such "elucidation" and "development" were helpful:

The figures in *Bleak House* now move rapidly, and the relation of the one to the other is becoming distinct. There is much skilful writing in the November number, and indeed up to this time the tale has shown a care and tasteful touching and re-touching, not to be discerned in the author's previous works. There is a high-wrought fineness and delicacy about *Bleak House*, which ensure admiration, if they are not enjoyed as much as were the rough humour and homely pathos of the earlier works.¹⁹²

II

When *Bleak House* Number X appeared in December 1852, it

¹⁹¹"Address Announcing the Termination of *Master Humphrey's Clock*" in Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop and Master Humphrey's Clock*, (London: The Gresham Publishing Company [n.d.]), p.427.

¹⁹²*The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 13 November 1852, p.731.

immediately raised a great deal of controversy among contemporaries on the subject of spontaneous combustion and the Skimpole-Hunt scandal.¹⁹³ It is well known that G.H. Lewes tried to ridicule Dickens for his "scientific error" in telling his readers that the death of Krook is caused by spontaneous combustion, because it "is absolutely *impossible*, according to all known laws of Combustion, and to the constitution of the human body." But what was more objectionable was that "it is a fault in Art, and fault in literature, overstepping the limits of Fiction, and giving currency to a vulgar error."¹⁹⁴

Lewes was, however, not the only one to question this curious death. A week before the publication of *The Leader* article, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* noted,

The account of [Krook's] manner of dying being

¹⁹³On spontaneous combustion see G.S. Haight, "Dickens and Lewes on Spontaneous Combustion," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 10(1955), 53-63; R.D. McMaster, "Dickens and the Horrific," *Dalhousie Review* 38(1958), 21-24; R. Hunter and I. Macalpine "Dickens and Conolly, An Embarrassed Editor's Disclaimer," *Times Literary Supplement* (1961), 534-35; Janice Nadelhaft, "The English Malady, Corrupted Humours, and Krook's Death," *Studies in the Novel* 1(1969), 231-39; T. Blount, "Dickens and Mr. Krook's Spontaneous Combustion," *Dickens Studies Annual* 1(1970), 183-211; E. Gaskell, "More About Spontaneous Combustion," *Dickensian* 69 (1973), 25-35; on the Skimpole-Hunt controversy see Stephen F. Fogle, "Skimpole Once More," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 7(1952), 1-18; K.J. Fielding, "Skimpole and Leigh Hunt Again," *Notes & Queries* (1955), 174-75, and "Leigh Hunt and Skimpole: Another Remonstrance," *Dickensian* 64(1968), 5-9; Brahma Chaudhuri, "Leonard Skimpole in Bleak House," *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 6(1975), 75-78;

¹⁹⁴*The Leader*, 11 December 1852, p.1189.

given in a mystic style, which may not be very fine writing; but, for our own part, we confess, with all our respect for Mr. Dickens's talents, that we think the concluding passage of the last of the subjoined extracts [on Krook's death by spontaneous combustion], very positive nonsense.¹⁹⁵

But, as R.D. McMaster and E. Gaskell have convincingly demonstrated, among the common people, who read *The Terrific Register* and the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, and the scientific community, including renowned medical practitioners, a belief was current that spontaneous combustion of the human body was possible.¹⁹⁶ Dickens was one of these people, and so were many of his readers who did not find anything unusual in Krook's mode of death. In fact, the reviewer of *Bell's Life in London* greeted this particular episode as "among the most telling incidents." The reviewer said:

Mr. Dickens, in describing the decease of Mr. Krook, takes occasion to give another rub to the equity side of Westminster Hall. He says, "The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts. . . ."

. . ." By this we presume Mr. Dickens would

¹⁹⁵*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 5 December 1852, p.6.

¹⁹⁶McMaster, pp.23-24; Gaskell, p. 35.

insinuate that some fine day Lord St. Leonards, and who knows, perhaps all the gentlemen of the long robe, who attend the Chancery Courts, will disappear in a cloud of smoke, and only leave behind them the soles of their boots and their horse hair wigs.¹⁹⁷

The symbolic message conveyed through Krook's peculiar death was not completely lost; it was appreciated and understood by many of his contemporary readers. Dickens's Number-plan for Chapter 32 in Number X, where he noted down, "All things still and wrong - 'Spontaneous Combustion and no other death'," strongly suggests that this message, or rather warning, and not the literal spontaneous combustion of the human body, was what he had intended for his reading-public. But he was so carried away by his collection of facts to prove his point, that he never once alluded to the allegorical significance of the controversial episode. Dr. John Elliotson had provided Dickens with some famous cases of spontaneous combustion. Dickens carefully kept those by him until the last number and wrote back to Dr. Elliotson:

It is inconceivable to me how people can reject such evidence, supported by so much familiar knowledge, and such reasonable analogy. But I suppose the long and short of it is, that they

¹⁹⁷*Bell's Life in London*, Dec 12, 1852, p.3.

don't know, and don't want to know, anything about the matter.¹⁹⁸

One journalist, however, came forward in support of Dickens. The gossip columnist of *The Critic* found this an opportunity to attack a rival journal. He commented on

Six letters on the death of Krook, in a journal calling itself *The Leader*, which was to have put down Toryism and Christianity for ever, as well as have set the Thames on fire. Mr. Grave hastens to explain (lest there should be six letters in the *Leader* on the subject) that he uses the expression "set the Thames on fire" not chemically, but metaphorically.

Parodying Lewes's argument, the columnist said:

Water, he is well aware, is composed of oxygen, the great combustion supporter, and of hydrogen, a highly inflammable gas; but it cannot in itself be set on fire; nor will he seek shelter under the circumstance that as the Thames (my Lord Palmerston not having yet taken it in hand) contains a quantity of "fatty" and other matters, it might be capable of combustion. No! he scorns such a subterfuge, and adheres to his metaphor.

But the best argument in favour of Dickens, which

¹⁹⁸Nonesuch, II, 446-47.

Dickens himself could have provided instead of wasting his time in fact-finding, was:

But why should "my good friend Mr. Lewes" confine his objections to poor Krook's spontaneous combustion and not range in search of physiologically impossible deaths through the whole range of contemporary fiction? Nothing, for instance, is more common in novels than to die of a "broken heart;" why not six letters to prove the physical and physiological impossibility of breaking a heart. What a crowd of unscientific toxicological diseases in the *Lucretia* of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Bart.; could not *The Leader* expose the absurdity of some of them?¹⁹⁹

Such a rejoinder from Dickens could have silenced Lewes long ago.

But Dickens took an unusual course, possible only in a serial fiction. In *Bleak House* Number XI (Chapter 33) he retorted against critics like G.H. Lewes, these "men of science and philosophy," for their objection to "Krook's obstinacy, in going out of the world by any such by-way." This, however, did not stop Lewes.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

²⁰⁰See *The Leader*, 15 January 1853, p.64, 29 January 1853, p.111, 15 February 1853, p.137, 22 February 1853, p.161, 26 March 1853, p.303, and 2 April 1853, p.320.

III

Some of the readers of *Bleak House* Number X were intrigued by the sudden change of Skimpole's first name from Harold to Leonard in Chapter 31. A correspondent, who signed himself quite interestingly as "Lawrence Boythorn," wrote to the editor of *The Morning Chronicle*: "Would Mr. Dickens kindly inform a wondering public why his airy friend Mr. *Harold* Skimpole, whom he had the honour of introducing into society some months ago, is now travelling about under the *alias* of Mr. *Leonard* Skimpole?"²⁰¹ A few days later the critic of *Bell's Life in London* raised the same question and asked "why Mr. Harold Skimpole has found it necessary to change his name to Leonard."²⁰²

One recalls that Forster and B.W. Procter had warned Dickens that "the likeness" between Skimpole and Leigh Hunt was "too like" and that, acting on their suggestions, he made some alterations, particularly in changing Skimpole's first name from Leonard, which was too close to Leigh, to Harold. As Dickens wrote to Forster on 18 March 1852, "I have again gone over every part of it very carefully, and I think I have made it much less like, I have also changed Leonard to Harold."²⁰³ Dickens made this change in Chapter 6, Number II. Skimpole appears with his first name next in -----

²⁰¹*The Morning Chronicle*, 3 December 1852, p.4.

²⁰²*Bell's Life in London*, 12 December 1852, p.3.

²⁰³Forster, II, 101.

chapter 18, Number VI, which could not have been written before 1 June 1852.

One can therefore assume that in this and later chapters Dickens would naturally write Harold instead of Leonard. But a close examination of the original manuscript reveals otherwise. In almost every instance Dickens first wrote "Leonard" and then corrected it to "Harold." The name "Harold" appears ten times in Chapter 37, eight times in Chapter 43, and three times in Chapter 57. In the manuscript Dickens wrote "Leonard" in Chapter 6, Number II, and did not correct it. The alterations he mentions in his letter quoted above were made only in proof where "Leonard" was deleted wherever it occurred and "Harold" was written in the margin. In Chapter 18, Number VI, in the first instance "Harold" was written after a deleted word. In the second instance there is some revision and again "Harold Skimpole" was written above a deleted word. In Chapter 31, Number X, Dickens wrote "Leonard" in all the four places. In the last instance in this chapter ("Leonard Skimpole had found himself, to his considerable surprise"), however, two words, "that child" were deleted and "Leonard Skimpole" written above them. In Chapter 32, Number XII, Dickens wrote "Harold" after a deleted word (illegible). In the first four instances of Chapter 43, Number XIV, Dickens wrote "Harold." Then again he seems to have forgotten

"Harold" in the passage where Sir Leicester says:

"Mr. Hirrold--Herald--Harold--Skampling--Skumpling
I beg your pardon--Skimpole."

"This is Mr. Harold Skimpole," said my
guardian, evidently surprised.

Here Dickens originally wrote "Leonard" and the distorted versions of "Leonard" (distortions not clearly legible), deleted the words, and wrote "Hirrold--Herald--Harold" above them. In "This is Mr. Harold Skimpole" Dickens originally wrote "Leonard Skimpole," deleted "Leonard" and wrote "Harold" above it. In one instance, however, in Chapter 31 of Number X, the error slipped out, got printed, and as has been seen, noticed by the reading public. Dickens corrected the slip in a list of "Errata" that appeared with the final double number of *Bleak House* in September 1853. But the harm was already done. Much has been written in recent times on the Skimpole-Leigh Hunt controversy, but no one has so far pointed out how this particular error contributed so largely to the identification of Skimpole as Leigh Hunt.

Chapters 6, 7, 15, and 18 of the novel had already provided sufficient traits to make Skimpole recognizable in certain circles as Hunt; to those who had already grown suspicious, the sudden appearance of the name "Leonard" came as a further hint that the character was based on the living original. The

literary critic of *The Morning Chronicle* was, of course, the first to hint at this similarity. In reviewing Number XII of *Bleak House*, he pointed out:

And then, when Skimpole--who, by the way, has got the right name of Harold again, not Leonard--is made to look a mere calculator; he not only loses his amusing quality, but he loses his artistic charm. A swindler is an old creation, but a self-deluding aesthetic voluptuary--gleams of which form we first saw in the figure--was a happy comic original. It looks as if Mr. Dickens had tried to make a character out of some of the weaknesses and affectations of an actual character.²⁰⁴

A few weeks later the gossip columnist of *The Critic* was more explicit. Referring to Number XIV of *Bleak House* he said:

Miss Thackeray may ransack all the books written by her "Pa" and not find anything so severe as the portrait of Mr. Harold Skimpole, who, with his family around him, became in the last number of *Bleak House* not merely recognisable, but unmistakable. Will Dickens complete his series of sketches from this remarkable family by a portrait of Skimpole, Junior--Skimpole, Junior, with his vast

²⁰⁴*The Morning Chronicle*, 8 February 1853, p.3.

yearnings for the emancipation of the human
 race, bearing a standard with "Natural
 Affection" emblazoned on it in one hand, and
 with the other dealing you a stealthy blow from
 behind:--"The erect, the manly foe" one does
 not heed. When tired of Skimpole, Senior, pray,
 Mr. Dickens, try your hand on Skimpole,
 Junior.²⁰⁵

Though Leigh Hunt is not named here, the description of
 his son's activities helps to identify him. Thornton
 Hunt was a well-known journalist. He and his friend,
 G.H. Lewes, had founded the weekly newspaper, *The
 Leader*, in 1850. The two friends gained notoriety at
 this time as "blackguard literary fellows" for their
 belief in free-love and experiment in communal living,
 known as "phalanstery." Hunt's scandalous affair with
 Lewes's wife made him particularly vulnerable to
 criticism, especially in view of his controversial
 signed articles in *The Leader*. *The Critic* never spared
 an opportunity of attacking the editor of a rival
 paper.²⁰⁶

The Skimpole-Hunt scandal caused Dickens a great
 deal of embarrassment and unpleasantness. He was,
 however, successful in convincing his critics that the
 uncomplimentary traits of the character were not based

²⁰⁵*The Critic*, 15 April 1853, p.198.

²⁰⁶See *The Critic*, 16 February 1852, p.87;
 15 October 1852, p.528; 1 December 1852, p.610.

on anything he knew of Leigh Hunt²⁰⁷ But Hunt's death six years later stirred up the scandal once again. This time Dickens was forced to publish an apologetic article, "Leigh Hunt, a Remonstrance," in *All the Year Round*, denying that he had ever intended to offend his friend.²⁰⁸ Dickens's own admission to Mrs. Richard Watson, however, leaves no doubt that he had intended not only a caricature but "an exact portrait" of the original. Dickens felt quite proud of his achievement and wrote, "There is not an atom of exaggeration or suppression. It is an absolute reproduction of a real man." This conscious desire for an "absolute reproduction of a real man" perhaps explains why Dickens could never erase from his memory the original name he had given to his character.

²⁰⁷ See Forster, II, 102.

²⁰⁸ "Leigh Hunt, a Remonstrance," *All the Year Round*, 24 December 1859, pp.206-208. But *The Critic* was not convinced. In its review of Hunt's revised *Autobiography* the periodical challenged "the sincerity of Mr. Dickens's assurance that he did not draw the bad parts of the Skimpolian philosophy from Leigh Hunt." The reviewer cited several passages from the novel to detail the similarity between the fictional character and the original, emphasizing particularly those which do "so little to the credit of Mr. Skimpole." Then he remarked: "[We] are puzzled to understand how he can reconcile these passages with the statement that he has not magnified the failing of the real man into the vice of the ideal character. That he has lived to see the injustice of the caricature we can well understand; but the caricature is there for all that." *The Critic*, 21 January 1860, p.81.

IV

The reader's response to the middle numbers of *Bleak House* was probably what Dickens had desired. In reviewing Number XI, *The Sunday Times* remarked:

Each number is manifestly increasing in interest, as usually happens when Mr. Dickens reaches about the middle of his tale. The proportion between caricature and earnest portrayal of character is diminished, and there is less tenuity in the incidents.²⁰⁹

Number XI continued with further details on Krook's death, and raised fresh curiosity by telling the readers about Mr. Guppy's mysterious meeting with Lady Dedlock, and Mr. Tulkinghorn's desperate attempt to compare a sample of handwriting with one of Captain Hawdon's now in the possession of Mr. George.

Krook's melodramatic death in Number X created a sensation, no doubt; but the element which contributed most to the "increasing" interest in the middle numbers was the revelation of Esther's identity in Number IX. Once told about the relationship between Esther and Lady Dedlock, the readers waited impatiently to know more about it. But unlike other serial writers, Dickens did not rush to solve the mystery the next month in

²⁰⁹*The Sunday Times*, 23 January 1853, p.2.

Number X, or even in Number XI. He waited until Number XII for the emotional scene between Esther and Lady Dedlock. It was a well calculated serial strategy aimed at heightening the readership interest to the maximum.²¹⁰ How far was Dickens successful?

According to Philip Collins, Dickens's 'big scene' on the revelation of Esther's identity was a failure. He says:

Dickens tries to work up some excitement for Esther's big scene, but her reaction is altogether too simple and placid. Granted that she is automatically virtuous in all circumstances, she should have been given more complex emotions on learning that Dedlock is her mother.²¹¹

At least one contemporary reviewer had similar reservations. *The Morning Chronicle* thought that the story "moved very slowly" in Number XII. "After all the elaboration of the Dedlock mystery, out comes the simple confession of her ladyship to Esther with quite an effect of flatness." The reviewer refused to be pleased only with mere "excitement" by a writer of Dickens's standing. "Humour, vivacity, scenery, and the

²¹⁰Dickens's original intention, as the Number-plan reveals, was to include the crucial Esther-Lady Dedlock encounter in Number XI. But he changed his mind, crossed out the chapter, and shifted it to Number XII in a deliberate attempt to delay the suspense.

²¹¹Collins, *Critical Commentary*, pp. 65-66.

like" might be admirable qualities in an ordinary writer. But from Dickens the reader expected the "sovereign quality of fiction, truthfulness." Regrettably, it could not be said of Dickens's characters that "they are truthful portraits of men and women."²¹²

Such was, however, not the reaction of other reviewers. There seems to have been an overwhelming admiration for Esther in Number XII, even from those who had commented unfavourably on her character earlier. The reviewer of *Bell's Life in London*, who had criticized Dickens for making Esther "too angelic--too good for this world" in Number VIII,²¹³ now said:

The tone of tenderness that pervades--no not pervades, that interpenetrates this number is absolutely painful. Esther Summerson, with her scarred face, is one hundred times more lovely than she was when her brow was smooth. All her intense sensibility and amiableness is natural.²¹⁴

Similarly, *The Sunday Times* had thought that "Esther is too uniformly good and prudent, and has rather an old

²¹²*The Morning Chronicle*, 8 February 1853, p.3.

²¹³*Bell's Life in London* 10 October 1852, p.2.

²¹⁴*Bell's Life in London*, 20 February 1853, p.8.

head for her youthful shoulders."²¹⁵ But on reading Number XII, the reviewer remarked:

Mr. Dickens has shown wonderful skill in identifying himself with the thoughts and feelings of a young and unaffected girl, as Esther is pictured to us, and is equally felicitous in giving them expression.²¹⁶

The critics then were not as subtle as they are now. They failed to interpret Esther's illness or her disfigurement in symbolic terms.²¹⁷ But they could at least recognize Dickens's skill in revealing Esther's "intense sensibility" and "thoughts and feelings" at a particular moment in her life. They could also admire Dickens, as *The Weekly News and Chronicle* did, for his ability to

mirror the secret workings of a woman's mind. He has caught the very blush of the feelings, and the sigh that dies in its birth. Esther's conduct, when she first sees the ineffaceable ravages her illness has left on her features, and when she learns that Lady Dedlock is her mother, has a feminine grace which no other

²¹⁵*The Sunday Times*, 26 December 1852, p.2.

²¹⁶*The Sunday Times*, 13 February 1853, p.2.

²¹⁷See Alex Zwerdling, "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated," *PMLA* 88 (1973), 429-39; Lawrence Frank, "'Through a Glass Darkly': Esther Summerson and *Bleak House*"; Gordon D. Hirsch, "The Mysteries in *Bleak House*: A Psychoanalytic Study," *Dickens Studies Annual* 4(1975), 91-112, 132-52; Ellen Serlen, "The Two Worlds of *Bleak House*," *ELH* 43(1976), 551-66.

living writer could represent.²¹⁸

William Axton observes that, beginning with *Dombey and Son*, Dickens planned his novels systematically by placing a "keystone" episode in the middle of his serials as "a means of precipitating those meaningful actions and images that have hung suspended in solution, as it were, throughout the narrative up to that point." In *Bleak House*, Axton argues, the "keystone" structure operates precisely at the centre of the novel--in Number X.²¹⁹ It is true that Dickens had very carefully planned the mid-point of *Bleak House*. But it does not appear from either the Number-plans or the responses he received--if responses could be considered an indication of lack or heightening of readership interest--that Dickens had set aside Number X in particular as a "keystone" centre of the novel. Instead, as I have tried to demonstrate, when Dickens reached the middle of his serial, he concentrated on more than one number to lead "up to the great turning idea of the Bleak House," as he wrote to Angela Burdett-Coutts.²²⁰ Dickens heightened the interest of his readers by revealing Lady Dedlock's relationship with Esther in Number IX, Krook's melodramatic death in Number X, raising curiosity about

²¹⁸*The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 5 February 1853, p.92.

²¹⁹Axton p.34.

²²⁰Johnson, p.215.

the mysterious movements of Mr. Guppy and Mr. Tulkinghorn involving Lady Dedlock in Number XI, and finally by intensifying the suspense by bringing Esther and Lady Dedlock together in Number XII.

V. Numbers Thirteen Through Eighteen

I

"There is not much movement in 'Bleak House' this month," remarked *The Weekly Dispatch* when Number XIII of *Bleak House* appeared in March 1853. Others, *The Weekly News and Chronicle* and *Bell's Life in London*, who noticed it very briefly, agreed with *The Weekly Dispatch*. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was almost enraged to find that the number was utterly devoid of any action worthy of being reported to its readers.

Shakespeare, when he wrote his *Hamlet*, had in view a short, stout actor, whom he knew would perform the principal character; and he introduced the line, "Our son is fat and scant of breath," in order to excuse the brevity of *Hamlet's* speech in his last scene. Mr. Dickens reminds us of this circumstance; not by his brevity, but by the contrast which he makes in "Bleak House," to the pithiness of Shakespeare's play. No one can say that Mr. Dickens is brief, who reads, and wonders as he reads, the long chapters which constitute the present number, the sum and substance of

which might be put into a lady's thimble.²²¹

What seems interesting is that it is one of the chapters from this number, entitled "National and Domestic," that Kathleen Tillotson describes as "one of the brilliant scenes" in the novel.²²² In 1870, the subject of this scene (Chapter 40), the defeat of Sir Leicester Dedlock at the hands of Mr. Rouncewell, Iron master, evoked Ruskin's unbounded admiration for Dickens.²²³ Later, in 1912, Shaw said: "His description of our party system, with its Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, etc., has never been surpassed for accuracy and for penetration of superficial pretence."²²⁴

But to the serial readers in March 1853, the political issue was not as topical as the Chancery theme was; in fact, it was already a matter of the past. Kathleen Tillotson expresses the hope that the contemporaries, while reading Chapter 40 in Number XIII, "would readily recall the general election of July 1852." Probably they did; but they seemed to have been little interested in its revival. They would have been happier if Dickens had given them some interesting developments in the story itself which was of immediate

²²¹*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 6 March 1853, p.6.

²²²Butt and Tillotson, p.188.

²²³Ruskin's letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 19 June 1870. Quoted in Ford, pp.94-95.

²²⁴George Bernard Shaw, "Introduction," *Hard Times*. Quoted in George H. Ford and Lauriet Lane, Jr., ed. *The Dickens Critics*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p.126.

concern to them.

Mr. Tulkinghorn's encounter with Lady Dedlock in Chapter 41 evoked some interest. "It is the first and fearfulest we can imagine," the reviewer of *Bell's Life in London* said.²²⁵ But *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* thought otherwise. It would have been effective, if it was introduced "more artistically, and less elaborated." Tulkinghorn, however, according to the reviewer, "is a well-drawn character and strikes the reader, notwithstanding the heaviness of the scenes in which he is engaged."²²⁶

When Number XIV appeared in April 1853, *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* once again complained that there was no "progress" in this number too. But, for the first time in several months, the reviewer admitted "how amusingly Mr. Dickens can occupy his readers' attention" with other interesting episodes--a description of Mr. Skimpole's family surroundings, Mr. Jarndyce's proposal to Esther, her chance meeting with Allan Woodcourt, and a closing chapter on Tom-all-Alone's. On Jarndyce's offer of marriage to Esther, the reviewer remarked:

Two good, unselfish hearts, making that world
of happiness around them which unselfish
goodness never fails to create, are

²²⁵*Bell's Life in London*, 6 March 1853, p.3.

²²⁶*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 6 March 1853, p.6.

interestingly exhibited in this number of Mr. Dickens's romance. The story may be unreal, but it is poetical; and happy for the world would it be if the poetry of human hearts were not capable of being driven out of its grim realities.²²⁷

The Sunday Times was not prepared for this development. The proposal would come as a surprise to most readers, it pointed out, "though, with her thoughtful disposition and 'Dame Durden' habits, such a match is less unsuitable than might be supposed, or rather, under the circumstances, it is the best that could be devised for her."²²⁸

By introducing Allan Woodcourt in the same number, Dickens clearly offered a foreshadowing of future possibilities. But the reviewer of *The Sunday Times* was not alert enough; or because of his dislike for Esther--evident in his use of epithets like "thoughtful disposition and Dame Durden habits"--he did not care much about her fate. The reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was, however, perceptive enough not to follow the false lead. He remarked:

Probably, the parties will not be married after all; for Esther as yet knows no other sentiment but gratitude, and the offer may be made by her

²²⁷*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 10 April 1853, p.6.

²²⁸*The Sunday Times*, 10 April 1852, p.2.

guardian only to ensure for her a protector. These are matters, however, into which it does not concern us to enter at present; we have only to state a fact which is told with grace and effect; and so leaving these dear good friends, now in the condition of lovers, with a dangerous rival "looming in the distance" in the person of Allan Woodcourt, the surgeon, returned from his travels . . . ²²⁹

On the character of Mr. Skimpole, there seemed to have been a very favourable response. Most readers were still not sure whether he was a downright rogue or a fool; but like *The Sunday Times*, they admitted that "he has the knack of turning all his infantile peculiarities to a good account, at the expense of other people. If his unworldly simplicity be not a 'dodge,' then is Harold Skimpole a psychological curiosity."²³⁰ The identification of this "refined Knave" with real Leigh Hunt in contemporary literary circles must have contributed to this "psychological curiosity." Though an exaggeration, the character provided hours of pleasant diversion to the readers.

II

In April 1853, Dickens was in a "frenzied state" of

²²⁹*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 10 April 1853, p.6.
²³⁰*The Sunday Times*, 18 April 1853, p.2.

mind. One day he was so "furiously" at work on *Bleak House* Number XV, "that at noon I was comparatively insensible," he wrote to the Duke of Devonshire.²³¹ Dickens had reason to be "frenzied." Like his readers, he must have been aware that *Bleak House* had not made much progress in terms of its plot in Numbers XIII and XIV. The Esther-Dedlock mystery, which had sustained the readers' curiosity for months, was already solved. He must have felt the need to create new mysteries to hold the readers' interest for four more numbers. The serial required another acceleration at this point. In the Number-plan for XV two points are doubly underscored: "Mr. Tulkinghorn to be shot. Pointing Roman" and "Jo? Yes. Kill him." One was to rouse the readers' expectations and suspense; the other was to provide pathos.

However, it was the scene of Jo's death which received universal acclaim both at the time of serialization, and later when the novel was published in volume form. "The narrative of Jo's end," *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* said, "is one of the most touching bits that Mr. Dickens has written."²³² "Mr. Dickens has surpassed himself in this part of the story. The first chapter in it abounds in the purest and most unaffected pathos, descriptive of the last sufferings and death of

²³¹Nonesuch, II, 458, 18 April 1853.

²³²*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 8 May 1853, p.6.

poor Jo," remarked *Bell's Life in London*.²³³ Later, in 1872, Forster tells us how Dean Ramsay felt about it: "To my mind, nothing in the field of fiction is to be found in English literature surpassing the death of Jo!"²³⁴

The mysterious murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn aroused considerable interest in contemporary readers. Everyone tried to come out with his own inference of who the murderer could be. *The Sunday Times* believed that Lady Dedlock was the perpetrator. When Number XVI appeared in June, the reviewer once again insisted, "Suspicion still points darkly to Lady Dedlock as the murderess of Mr. Tulkinghorn."²³⁵

But at least three reviewers, and probably thousands of their readers, were on the right track in suspecting that the actual murderer was the French maid. According to *The Weekly Dispatch*, "That Lady Dedlock may be suspected is natural, that George is innocent is clear enough, but that the French fury fired the shot, is much more likely . . ."²³⁶ *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* also agreed that

Lady Dedlock, whose secret he [Tulkinghorn] had discovered, and which she knows he is about to divulge, has had some hand in it. We apprehend

²³³*Bell's Life in London*, 15 May 1853, p.8.

²³⁴Forster, II, 118.

²³⁵*The Sunday Times*, 8 May, p.2 and 5 June 1853, p.2.

²³⁶*The Weekly Dispatch*, 8 May 1853, p.294.

that the death of the family mischief-maker will be traced to the more vulgar hand of revengeful French women.²³⁷

The critic felt so convinced that in his review of the next number in June he reiterated:

We must repeat our belief that the lady [Lady Dedlock] is as innocent of the crime as Mr. George himself (now in prison on suspicion), which is no doubt the work of the revengeful servant, Mademoiselle; and the latter will probably be found to have written those anonymous letters to Mr. Bucket.²³⁸

Bell's Life in London was happy that Tulkinghorn was finally disposed of. But it did not comment on the murder of Tulkinghorn. But while discussing Number XVI, the reviewer observed, "We fancy the assassin will be found in the cashiered[?] French lady's maid of Lady Dedlock."²³⁹

The Weekly Dispatch made an interesting comment on Dickens's inability to provide sufficient motivation for the murder of Tulkinghorn. The reviewer said:

. . . the exit of Tulkinghorn . . . has a forced and somewhat clumsy air about it. When the frowning, plotting, and highly disagreeable persons who play a bad part in a story begin to

²³⁷*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 8 May 1853, p.6.

²³⁸*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 5 June 1853, p.6.

²³⁹*Bell's Life in London*, 9 June 1853, p.3.

force themselves too much into company, and grow embarrassing to the author, he has, *sans cérémonie*, the trick of carrying them off by "battle, murder, or sudden death" and is by no means particular about the matter.

From the clues provided by the author the reviewer could suspect that the French maid was possibly the murderer, but he was "disappointed at the insufficiency of the means to the end."²⁴⁰

Later, in his review of the complete edition of *Bleak House*, George Brimley echoed the same objection:

Mr. Tulkinghorn, the Dedlock confidential solicitor, is an admirable study of mere outward characteristics of a class; but his motives and character are quite incomprehensible, and we strongly suspect that Mr. Dickens had him shot out of the way as the only possible method of avoiding an enigma of his own setting which he could not solve.²⁴¹

While the reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* enjoyed making surmises, he was very critical of sentimentalism in Number XVI. The reviewer said:

Anyone becoming acquainted with Mr. Dickens for the first time through the medium of the present chapters of "Bleak House", would be at

²⁴⁰*The Weekly Dispatch*, 8 May 1853, p.294.

²⁴¹*The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.924.

a loss to understand his popularity, and might feel inclined to attribute it to that capriciousness of taste and judgment which foreigners say is characteristic of the British public.²⁴²

The reviewer was referring to the sentimental scene in Chapter 51 where Ada discloses her marriage and goes to live with Richard. The parting is so unbearable to Esther and she feels so distressed that she walks quite a distance just to put her lips on the door of the lodging where Ada spends her night with Richard. "As here represented," the reviewer said, "Esther and Ada are idiots." He then said:

Yet Mr. Dickens has taken pains to impress his reader with an idea that the former is a person of judgment and correct manners, and he has at times succeeded to the extent of his desire. The intelligent, domesticated woman of feeling, zealous in the performances of household duties, yet finding time for and delighting in the exercises of charitable feelings, has been so happily realized that we cannot but regret to find her fondling a mere piece of insipidity like Ada . . . A woman like Esther, would be incapable of such extravagance.

The reviewer not only found it difficult to accept

²⁴²*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 5 June 1853, p.6.

Esther's eminent goodness and sincerity, but he also objected to Jarndyce's characterization in this number. Dickens writes pages of sentimental tears and feelings to describe Esther's reaction to the news of Ada's marriage with Richard, which obviously disturbed her on economic grounds. But when Mr. Jarndyce learns about the secret marriage from Esther, his only reaction is: "Heaven bless her, and her husband!" "Poor girl, poor girl! Poor Rick! Poor Ada!" (Chapter 51). The reviewer found this rather strange.

Mr. Jarndyce, indeed, is no more moved when he is told of it, than if, instead of a husband, his ward had only taken an antibilious pill. Jarndyce had been for years endeavouring to secure the happiness of Ada, yet he hears of the "rash act" which she has committed, exchanging hope and comfort for poverty, wretchedness, and despair, without any uneasiness; indeed we are led to infer he rather likes it than otherwise.²⁴³

The serial had sufficiently advanced now; there were only three more instalments (the last one being a double number) remaining to draw the story to its conclusion. But the reader was still left in suspense on certain issues. He was still in the act of "speculation and conjecture," as *The Sunday Times*

²⁴³*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 5 June 1953, p.6.

observed, "as to the final destination of the chief characters." The reviewer praised Dickens's successful technique in keeping the reader "intensely anxious to be informed" at this stage of the serial. He also admired the "carefulness and power which Dickens invariably displays in the working up, if not always in the earlier portion of his tales."²⁴⁴

The concluding numbers of *Bleak House* are filled with fast-moving incidents and a variety of characters waiting for their fate at the hand of the author. This is the part where Dickens tries to tie up all his loose ends, bestowing on each character his reward or punishment and bringing each episode to a satisfactory end. *The Sunday Times*, as we have seen, enjoyed the suspense and excitement; but some, as we shall see in the next section, did not approve of Dickens's clumsy serial ending.

III

There could have been a great disappointment for the readers who waited so anxiously and eagerly for Number XVII to appear in July. Dickens was barely saved from a serious illness. In the first week of June, while he was still writing Number XVII, he went to Folkestone, near Dover, to rest for a few days. "I feel aches and pains when I sit up to write," he told his publishers,

²⁴⁴*The Sunday Times*, 5 June 1853, p.2.

Bradbury & Evans, on 11 June. The next day he wrote, "If I can only manage to sit at it long enough at a time, I have great hopes of doing the No. yet, please God."²⁴⁵ After spending six painful days in Folkestone, Dickens decided, against everyone's judgment but his own, to set out for Boulogne. On 18 June when he was writing a letter to W.H. Wills, he was only half way through the Number.²⁴⁶ Fortunately for him, and for the reader of *Bleak House*, the change of place and climate helped the author to feel better. It was a narrow escape from a disaster. "If I had substituted anybody's knowledge of myself for my own," wrote Dickens, "and lingered in London, I never could have got through."²⁴⁷

This illness and the disruption it caused did not seem to have any effect on Number XVII. *The Sunday Times* was so pleased with the number that it said, "Every reader of *Bleak House*, we think, will admit this to be one of the best numbers yet published."²⁴⁸ *Bell's Life in London* did not think it was the "best part . . . though there are in it some startling incidents."²⁴⁹ *The Observer* tried to draw the attraction of its readers with an opening sentence: "In this number of *Bleak House* a mine is sprung, which

²⁴⁵Nonesuch, II, 463-64.

²⁴⁶Nonesuch, II, 465.

²⁴⁷Forster, II, 126.

²⁴⁸*The Sunday Times*, 10 July 1853, p.2.

²⁴⁹*Bell's Life in London*, 24 July 1853, Supplement, p.4.

nearly blows Lady Dedlock and her pompous spouse out of the water."²⁵⁰ But *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was critical; the reviewer could not be easily swayed by the arrest of the French maid or Mr. Bucket's meticulous methods of investigation. He had already anticipated that Esther was the daughter of Lady Dedlock by Hawdon, and that Hortense was the murderer of Tulkinghorn. He objected to Dickens's method of characterization. But he did not simply raise objections to exaggeration or caricature, as others did. Instead, he criticized Dickens for his failure to present his characters objectively and dramatically. He observed:

So much space was wasted in former parts of this romance, that Mr. Dickens appears to find himself under the necessity of making the characters relate important portions of the story, which ought to have been narrated in action. Mrs. Bagnet, for instance, says a great deal to Mrs. Rouncewell that would probably have been otherwise told, but for the near approach to the twentieth number; and Mr. Inspector Bucket takes some of the main points of the story to Sir Leicester Dedlock also to

²⁵⁰*The Observer*, 3 July 1853, p.6.

economise space.²⁵¹

The idea of the dramatic rendering of characters was not unknown to the Victorians in the mid-nineteenth century. The quoted passage indicates that even a newspaper critic recognized objective characterization as part of the essence of the art of the novelist. As Richard Stang has demonstrated, Dickens himself was in no way less conscious of this art than any other of his contemporaries.²⁵² In refusing a novel from Mrs. Brookfield for *All The Year Round*, Dickens wrote: "It strikes me that you constantly hurry your narrative (and yet without getting on) by telling it, in a sort of impetuous breathless way, in your own person, when the people should tell it and act it for themselves."²⁵³ In Number XVII, though Dickens does not forget this principle, he tries to tell George's story to Mrs. Rouncewell through Mrs. Bagnet, and Lady Dedlock's through Mr. Bucket. The result is still dramatic. But there is also truth in the reviewer's criticism. Since Dickens has a great deal to say in the last few numbers, he gives the impression of ending the story, to put it in his own words, "in a sort of impetuous breathless way."

²⁵¹*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 10 July 1853, p.6.

²⁵²Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp.99-100.

²⁵³Nonesuch, II, 461.

Another reviewer to raise a similar objection was that of *The Morning Chronicle*. In his review of the double number of *Bleak House* in September, the critic referred to Number XVII and said:

We must still reluctantly confess that we do not think that *Bleak House* has been wound up consistently with the promises sucessively held out at the different stages of its remarkable narrative.

The reviewer made a very interesting comment on the serial writer's obligations to his readers. He pointed out that at the commencement of a story which is to be narrated in instalments, the writer makes a kind of contract with the reader to fulfil certain obligations.

Upon the fulfilment of these obligations in no little part depends the position which he will ultimately, and in the eyes of posterity, occupy; and when they are patently not fulfilled, then is heard that most unpleasant critique, "he could not manage his plot."

The Tulkinghorn murder, according to the reviewer, was a turning point in the story. The plot was very "skilfully woven" up to this point. Circumstances leading to the arrest of the French maid and the accumulation of evidence were all narrated with a "surpassing skill." But then came the disappointment when the reader found out that there was not "one

single line or word of further particular respecting this most important personage, not so much as to hint at a trial or execution." It was "something very like playing off a practical joke upon an expectant public."²⁵⁴

Dickens's decision to draw a veil over the Hortense episode as soon as the mystery is resolved is a sign of Dickens's maturity in narrative technique. But the contemporaries expected the suspense to continue, and there was some reason behind it. The sensational trial and public execution of Mrs. Maria Manning in 1849 were still fresh in their minds. Dickens, who was himself an spectator of the execution, reproduced Mrs. Manning in Hortense with a "wonderful exactness."²⁵⁵ The identification was immediate, and with it the expectations.

The reviewer made an attempt to find out why Dickens had to dispose of Hortense so abruptly. Probably the reason was that Dickens was under the compulsion of writing only thirty-two pages for a number, and that "into this limit the trial of Hortense would not fit." But, he asked, "Why are the writers of serial tales so inflexibly restricted to that

²⁵⁴*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1853, p.7.

²⁵⁵See B.B. Valentine, "The Original of Hortense and the Trial of Marcia Manning for Murder" and James Atterbury Davies, "John Forster at the Manning Execution," *Dickensian* 19(1923), 21-22 and 67(1971), 12-15.

prescribed limit?" Could not the publisher provide supplementary sheets when necessary? The reviewer recognized the fact that for reasons of artistic freedom, an author should not be restricted to a specified number of pages, or even number of instalments.²⁵⁶

Another reviewer, in *Bell's Life in London*, also complained of the lack of dramatic action in Bucket's narration in Chapter 54. He said:

Detective Sergeant Bucket is too knowing and far too prosy. His communications to Sir Leicester Dedlock, touching the assassination of Tulkinghorn, are far too minute, and so become absolutely wearisome. How the proud Dedlock could listen to them surprises the reader.²⁵⁷

But this very quality of Mr. Bucket, his manner of unfolding mysteries with a keen attention to "minute" details, drew unqualified admiration from the reviewer of *The Sunday Times*. He said:

The entire interview of the celebrated "detective" with Sir Leicester is as admirable a scene as Dickens ever drew. First, there is Bucket marshalling every scrap and all minutiae of evidence tending to show the perpetrator of

²⁵⁶*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1853, p.7.

²⁵⁷*Bell's Life in London*, 24 July 1853, p.4.

crime; next, the intrusion of Grandfather Smallweed and confederates, all bent on making their market of the secret history of Lady Dedlock; then, the skilful entrapping of Hortense, with the startling revelations that establish her guilt; and lastly, the overpowering effect on poor Sir Leicester, now helpless and paralysed by what he has heard.²⁵⁸

The portrayal of the character of Sir Leicester Dedlock in Number XVIII also drew admiration from critics. Sympathizing with the agony and plight of the proud baronet in Chapter 58, *The Sunday Times* remarked, "This is a chapter which has been rarely matched for power and pathos."²⁵⁹ The reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, who could not be satisfied easily, was full of praise in this instance. "This is a fine sketch of a character; nothing finer perhaps is to be found in all Mr. Dickens's writings."²⁶⁰ Some of the later critics, who reviewed the novel after its completion, also admired Dickens for his successful portrayal of a gentleman of high birth. "With all his inanity, pomposity, and prejudice in favour of his order, the Lincolnshire baronet is a true gentleman," thought the writer of *The Athenaeum*. "We are not only told this, we are made to feel it." But about his wife, Lady Dedlock,

²⁵⁸*The Sunday Times*, 10 July 1853, p.2.

²⁵⁹*The Sunday Times*, 7 August 1853, p.2.

²⁶⁰*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 7 August 1853, p.6.

he had reservations. She is "a comparative failure" he said, "a second edition of *Mrs. Dombey*--with somewhat of real stateliness superadded."²⁶¹ *The Spectator* maintained that Dickens was never a successful delineator of characters belonging to high-born and wealthy families. Since he knew nothing of their lives, "his people of station are the vilest daubs; and Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, with his wife and family circle, are no exceptions."²⁶² The writer of the *Bentley's Monthly Review* rejected Sir Dedlock as "the worst to our taste," but praised Lady Dedlock as a grand creation. "Every inch a woman--an indomitable spirit, smothering all her griefs and all her remorse." This writer also noted Lady Dedlock's likeness to Edith Dombey and observed, "Mr. Dickens is as fond of depicting this class of female character as Lord Byron was of drawing Corsairs, and while the latter shewed a 'sneaking affection' for his villains, Mr. Dickens gives us the idea of being alarmed at his own strong-minded woman."

The reviewers of *Bleak House* Numbers XVII and XVIII were both enthusiastic and critical about the developments in the serial. None, however, could guess that owing to illness, Dickens had to write Number XVII under strenuous circumstances. The author's

²⁶¹*The Athenaeum*, 17 September 1853, p.1087.

²⁶²*The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.924.

indisposition, and the distractions it caused, had no effect on the progress of the serial. A firm control over the plan and purpose of the serial structure of the novel must have helped Dickens to overcome the critical situation.

VI. The Double Number

I

Throughout the month of August in 1853 Dickens's readers exchanged with one another questions such as "what do you think of *Bleak House*?"²⁶³ Such was the subject of conversation when a serial novel drew towards its concluding number. When the final instalment appeared on the last day of the month, the readers "hurried over the pages," as *The Morning Chronicle* reported, to have "their expectations gratified or foiled" by the author who "rejoices at last to feast to the full the cravings of the excited public."²⁶⁴ Before his readers had an opportunity to look at the number in the bookshops, Dickens, still in Boulogne, "had a little reading" of it on the night of 25 August. "It made a great impression I assure you," he wrote to Mrs. Richard Watson. "I will only add," he said,

that I like the conclusion very much and think it very pretty indeed. The story has taken extraordinarily, especially during the last five or six months, when its purpose has been gradually working itself out. It has retained

²⁶³See *Illustrated London News*, 24 September 1853, p.247.

²⁶⁴*Morning Chronicle*, 7 September, 1853, p.7.

its immense circulation from the first, beating dear old *Copperfield* by a round ten thousand or more. I have never had so many readers.²⁶⁵

Dickens made a similar assertion in his Preface to the first edition of *Bleak House*, published in September 1853. To make such claims in public was rather unusual in those days.²⁶⁶ *The Critic* was quick to point out:

In the preface affixed to the concluding double-number of this latest serial product of Mr. Dickens's fertile pen, the author takes the public into his confidence in a somewhat unusual way, and intimates pretty broadly that *Bleak House* had been commercially more successful than any of its predecessors.²⁶⁷

The general belief is that the success of the earlier novel, *David Copperfield*, had contributed to the increased popularity of the novelist and consequently to the sale of his next novel. But *The Critic*, which was not happy with *Bleak House*, did not agree. Its reviewer said:

For our own part, we are bound to say, that if *Bleak House* has been more successful than its predecessors, it must, in our opinion, owe that

²⁶⁵27 August 1853, Nonesuch II, 483.

²⁶⁶"I believe I have never had so many readers as in this book," wrote Dickens in the original preface to the first edition. This sentence was deleted from the prefaces to later editions.

²⁶⁷*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

superiority to some extrinsic rather than to any intrinsic claim to public favour; as a work of art, as an entertaining and interesting tale, as a collection of delineations of character, as a congeries of incidents, *Bleak House* seems to us decidedly inferior to *David Copperfield*, to *Dombey and Son*, nay, to *Martin Chuzzlewit* and to *Nicholas Nickleby*.²⁶⁸

The Critic's review of *Bleak House* was hostile; however, it cannot be said that the reviewer was disinterested or objective. The judgments of this periodical were often influenced by personal considerations. As a popular literary fortnightly, it saw any other similar periodical as a rival. As I have mentioned earlier, one of its professed rivals was *The Leader*. Dickens, as the editor of *Household Words*, was obviously one more target of its invectives. Elsewhere, in its feature column, *The Literary World: Its Sayings and Doings*, published the same day, we find it supporting Dickens on "Spontaneous Combustion" probably because it gave the columnist an opportunity to deride *The Leader*. But, in the same article, the columnist attacked Dickens for dedicating *Bleak House* to the Guild of Literature and Art. He said:

If Mr. Dickens really cares a straw about
anybody but himself, he can to-morrow show it

²⁶⁸*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

by affixing to their articles in *Household Words* the names of their respective writers. Immediately people would say, "What a clever fellow Brown is;" "Capital article, Jones's;" "First-rate writer, Robinson." And forthwith Paternoster-row would rush off to engage Brown, Jones, and Robinson, instead of, as at present, running after dull Lords and worn-out washed-out celebrities. If Mr. Dickens will not do this, don't let him pretend an interest in literary men, unknown to him or at a distance. Charity begins at home, and that of *The Household Words* is the earliest sphere in which Mr. Dickens should display it: the rest of the literary world can wait, or even can do without it.²⁶⁹

But *The Critic* offered an interesting explanation for the increased sale of *Bleak House*. It pointed out that the commercial success of *Household Words* might have contributed towards "making the name of the gifted novelist favourably known in circles in which he was formerly a stranger, and to whose regard he has now a new title, as the purveyor of useful knowledge in its

²⁶⁹*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.484. Whether it was Dickens's deliberate policy not to allow little known or new writers to sign their names in their articles or stories in *Household Words* might be a subject of future exploration.

most agreeable and acceptable garb."²⁷⁰

Another review of *Bleak House* which was unfavourable throughout appeared in *The Spectator*. This periodical, with its circle of readership confined mainly to the upper-middle-class section of the population, decried literary works which tended to be popular. It bracketed Dickens with G.W.M. Reynolds, and considered *Bleak House* as melodramatic and disagreeable as the *Mysteries of London*. "Dickens must be content," the reviewer said, "with the praise of amusing the idle hours of the greatest number of readers; not, we may hope, without improvement to their hearts, but certainly without profoundly affecting their intellects or deeply stirring their emotions."²⁷¹

In general, however, most reviews of *Bleak House* which appeared immediately after the publication of its final number were favourable. *Bell's Life in London* concluded its final review, by saying, "It is, on the whole, equal to the very best of Mr. Dickens's former productions."²⁷² *The Sunday Times* remarked, "*Bleak House* we are sure, will not be pronounced unworthy of Charles Dickens, for in the course of its development are unfolded all his finest peculiarities--his humour, pathos, variety in the creation of character, minute

²⁷⁰*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

²⁷¹*The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.924.

²⁷²*Bell's Life in London*, 18 September 1853, p.12.

detail, and fidelity of portrayal."²⁷³ *The Weekly News and Chronicle* praised it for making figures like Jo, Mrs. Jellyby, Old Turveydrop and Detective Inspector Bucket permanent treasures of English literature.²⁷⁴ *The Observer* regarded the work as "a finished specimen of minute painting in words," which could not be excelled in any language.²⁷⁵

With the exception of two, *The Spectator* and *The Critic*, the contemporary reviews of *Bleak House*, even including those which appeared after 1853, were either favourable or mixed. Many would rather agree with *Bentley's Miscellany*, that the novel contained the best and the worst of Dickens. In the following section I propose to examine mainly those reviews which appeared between September and December of 1853, immediately after the completion of the novel.

II

Charges invariably levelled against Dickens, even by friendly reviewers, were that his characters suffered from exaggeration. When *Bleak House* was completed, his reviewers accused him of the same defects and expressed dissatisfaction that he should be so deaf to the remonstrances of his critics. In the Preface to *Martin*

²⁷³ *The Sunday Times*, 4 September 1853, p.2.

²⁷⁴ *The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 3 September 1853, p.571.

²⁷⁵ *The Observer*, 4 September 1853, p.7.

Chuzzlewit Dickens had once tried to defend himself:

What is exaggeration to one class of mind and perceptions, is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called a long sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is *always* the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?

But this rebuke did not seem to have any effect on his reviewers. Admitting that Dickens had a very quick eye to discover the peculiarities in his fellowmen, the critic of *The Eclectic Review* pointed out that he fixed his attention so intently on certain peculiarities that often he could see nothing else. The result was that when the portrait was completed, the man "is often hidden beneath the mask of his eccentricities. It is as if a painter in sketching a countenance in which a large nose is the distinguishing feature, should, for a likeness, draw nothing but a nose, and forget to indicate that there is a face behind, though not so much of it to be seen as in other persons." *The Spectator* was even harsher:

. . . Mr. Dickens selects in his portraiture exactly what a farce-writer of equal ability and invention would select,--that which is coarsely marked and apprehended at first sight; that which is purely outward and no way significant of the man . . . the habit of seizing peculiarities and presenting them instead of characters, pervades Mr. Dickens's gravest and most amiable portraits, as well as those expressly intended to be ridiculous and grotesque . . .^{27 6}

The Court Journal detected a kind of arrogance in Dickens's disregard for art and his failure "to distinguish nature from caricature." The critic compared Dickens with Turner and said that both felt so superior and powerful that the "limits recognised by public opinion as the true and the real, fade before them." The reviewer continued:

It leads us to feel how essential it is to be governed by rule, how vital to success is the study of the real, and how prone to extravagance the human mind becomes when left to wanton with its own capacity . . . While Mr. Dickens touches with the keenest pen the many peculiarities of our social selves, and by a single shade places before us in unmistakable

^{27 6}*The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.924.

and permanent colours types of every class, he dwells with such unaccountable tenacity upon special features, and produces instances so isolated as to fix the reader's mind upon the personal or mental deformity of his people rather than the distinguishing type by which character is represented, and thus the weaknesses so common to humanity are constantly brought into relief, which leaves an impression almost painful upon the reader. This, it appears to me, is his prominent fault, if I may be permitted to point to a fault amidst such a blaze of power.

Though criticizing Dickens for his fault, this critic did not hesitate to recognize and pay tribute to the exceptional genius of Dickens. But he lamented the waste of this superior power in misdirected energy.

That Mr. Dickens stands quite alone in his singular facility of giving life and presence to his personages is beyond all doubt; yet, perhaps, that very property, the giving palpability to his people, leads us to look at the characters thus forcibly presented to us with more jealous eye.²⁷⁷

The critic of *Bentley's Miscellany* judged *Bleak House* as the worst of Dickens's novels on account of its

²⁷⁷*The Court Journal*, 15 October 1853, p.685.

"tendency to disagreeable exaggeration." He quoted the example of the *Smallweeds* "in which the extreme of physical infirmity, resulting from constitutional decay, is painted with a sickening minuteness; [they] are simply revolting." The critic took exception to the "great number of *dramatis personae*" and felt that they are nothing but "exaggerated exceptions, and represent nothing which we have ever seen, or heard, or dreamt of." He regarded these characters as "mere excrescences which we should like to see pruned away."²⁷⁸ *The Critic* did not mention the word "exaggeration," but found fault with almost each and every character. The writer of this review was disappointed at Dickens's failure to enrich one's mind and memory with any of those characters which in his former novels "have taken all men by quiet storm, and live on their lips and in their laughters."²⁷⁹

Bentley's Monthly Review, on the other hand, praised Dickens for a "great number and great variety of characters. The skill with which they are drawn is only equalled by the care, with which their characteristics are preserved throughout."²⁸⁰ The reviewer of *The Weekly News and Chronicle* was full of admiration:

²⁷⁸ *Bentley's Miscellany*, October 1853, p.372.

²⁷⁹ *The Critic*, 15 October 1853, p.685.

²⁸⁰ *Bentley's Monthly Review*, October 1853, reprinted in A.E. Dyson, ed., *Dickens: Bleak House: A Casebook*, (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.66.

The story abounds in sharp and finely-cut profiles of human character, and is so far successful in this respect that more than one personage has been adopted into the English language, by common consent, as the representative of an idea. It is impossible to allow the figures of poor Joe, Mrs. Jellyby, Old Turveydrop, Mrs. Bagnet, Sergeant Bucket, and George to pass before the mind without entertaining alike profound admiration for the genius of him who brought them into life . . .²⁸¹

Of all the characters in *Bleak House*, that of Esther Summerson, the heroine, was the object of either severe criticism or unqualified praise. While some reviewers found her unconscious goodness and admirable qualities, her loving and kindly disposition, her sweet nature and humility most unconvincing, others thought her the most perfect model of female character ever delineated in literature or painting. "It is impossible to doubt the simplicity of her nature," wrote *The Spectator*,

because she never omits to assert it with emphasis. This is not only coarse portraiture, but utterly untrue and inconsistent. Such a

²⁸¹*The Weekly News and Chronicle*, 3 September 1853, p.571.

girl would not write her own memoirs, and certainly would not bore one with her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very 'spicy', or confine herself to superintending the jam-pots at *Bleak House*." ²⁸²

To the critic of *The Westminster Review* she is just fatiguing for the "pains she takes to show how wonderfully good she is, and how unconscious of her goodness." ²⁸³ The reviewer of *The Critic* was almost abusive when he said:

. . . her perpetual amiability and sweetness and self-sacrifice rather palled upon us; and that we could not help thinking, when reading her most amiable confessions, with a semi-regretful feeling of that inexcusable little lady, Miss Becky Sharp, or of that wildly-demure one, Miss Jane Eyre, and others of her sisterhood. 'Methinks', as Hamlet says, 'the lady doth protest too much,' and there is a good deal of water in her milk of human kindness With the Vaccination Extension Act, small-pox will probably disappear by degrees, but not for sometime; and meanwhile, to the owners of beautiful faces whom that fell

²⁸² *The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.924.

²⁸³ *The Westminster Review*, October 1853, reprinted in Dyson, pp.70-71.

disease may ravage, Miss Summerson's story will be an Evangel of patience, and they may be pardoned if they come within many degrees of its practice.²⁸⁴

But the writer of *Bentley's Monthly Review*, who praised Dickens highly for such a "perfectly loveable" female character, could appreciate that though the character was revealed through her own account of herself, there is not a grain of self-praise in her autobiography, nor is there on the other hand that mock depreciation of herself which a person of real vanity, but pretended humility, would assume . . . Consummate art this is in the author! He does not draw his heroine's picture: he does not even make her do it; he leaves the reader to do it himself, and yet the latter (be he ever so dull-witted) can draw it only one way, under his unseen guidance, and the result is one of the most exquisite female creations that ever issued from the brain of poet or painter.²⁸⁵

But few of Dickens's readers, then or now, would agree with such eulogy.

²⁸⁴*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

²⁸⁵Dyson, p.67.

III

In the opening number of *Bleak House*, Dickens made it quite apparent to his readers that the Chancery Court was going to be the primary theme of his novel. By drawing an analogy between the Chancery and Chesney Wold in Chapter 2, he tried to demonstrate how close the world of Chancery was to the world of fashion. Dickens sought to keep the connection between the two worlds alive and constantly present from number to number through a complex mechanism of plot and an intricate relationship of characters and events. As I have already shown, the topic found immediate response among contemporaries. When the novel reached its conclusion, the theme was still fresh in his reader's mind. As *The Sunday Times* observed:

How finely its incidents have been linked together, and how admirably they illustrate the purpose of the writer . . . The leading idea, never lost sight of, is to expose the working and effects of the monster grievance, viz., the Court of Chancery; everything set forth concerning that legal abyss being, as he states in his preface, "substantially true, and within the truth." It may be difficult, even for a Dickens, to deepen our horror of a Chancery

suit, but, if anything can have that effect, it must be a tale like this . . .²⁸⁶

Even the reviewer of *The Critic*, who did not find anything else praiseworthy in the novel, changed his tone from harsh criticism to loud admiration, when he came to talk about the Chancery topic in the last paragraph of his long review.

In this practical age it is no demerit of the book that it has a practical tendency . . . in *Bleak House* the iniquities of Chancery are exhibited with a quiet but a telling indignation.

Referring to Dickens's defensive statement in the Preface on the question of the reputation of the Court of Chancery, the reviewer insisted that the public did not require "explanations and justifications" from the author.

Law reform was a reform well under way before Mr. Dickens put pen to paper in the composition of his last novel; but it has far proceeded at a pace all the more rapid, and with a sympathy all the more general, since *Bleak House* held up to view, in a lively pictorial fashion, the deep misery occasioned for generations by the

²⁸⁶ 4 September 1853, p.2.

"law's delay."²⁸⁷

Dickens's criticism of Chancery and his indignation might not be directly responsible for effecting any legislation or reform; but there was no doubt among contemporaries that his novel had strongly influenced the general attitude of the people against the whole machinery connected with the legal system.²⁸⁸

The importance of the Chancery theme was also underlined by Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Mrs. Oliphant was persistently hostile to Dickens;²⁸⁹ but for once she acknowledged:

. . . even admitting that Mr. Dickens comes late into the field, it is not to be denied that, for the purpose of his story, he makes very effective use of his suit in Chancery."²⁹⁰

The Weekly Dispatch pointed out that it was the Chancery theme which was responsible for the increased readership of *Bleak House*:

The iniquities of the Court of Chancery . . . were sufficiently patent to all the world, and the world was eager to see how a gifted man

²⁸⁷*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490. Some of the words and phrases in this passage suggest that the reviewer was also referring to Lord Denman's pamphlet on *Bleak House*.

²⁸⁸See also House, p.222.

²⁸⁹See [Margaret Oliphant], "Charles Dickens," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 77 (1855), 451-466; "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 91 (1862), 564-584; and "Charles Dickens," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 109 (1871), 673-695.

²⁹⁰*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1855, p.462.

could turn so important a social *fact* into account.²⁹¹

But *The Spectator* felt otherwise. It thought that the only purpose of the Chancery suit was "to introduce a crowd of persons as suitors, lawyers, law-writers, law-stationers, and general spectators of Chancery business." It "has positively not the smallest influence on the character of any one person concerned; nor has it any interest of itself."²⁹²

Very few contemporaries could agree with such an irresponsible comment. But the opinion was expressed by a periodical which had a reputation for its perception and good sense. There was, therefore, the need for an adequate defense from another periodical of similar standing. Fortunately for Dickens, his friend and biographer, John Forster, held the rein of *The Examiner* at this time. Two weeks later, Forster replied:

Marvellous is the skill with which, towards this intention, the great Chancery suit on which the plot hinges, and on incidents connected with which, important or trivial, all the passion and suffering turns, is worked into every part of the book. Whenever the occasion arises, or the art of the story-teller requires, the thick atmosphere of the law that

²⁹¹ 14 September 1853, p.566.

²⁹² *The Spectator*, 24 September 1853, p.923.

rises out of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce is made to cling like a fog about the people in the story. It may be more or less, but there it is. Either as a thick cloud or a light mist, it is to be seen everywhere. Lawyers of many grades, law clerks of all kinds, the copyist, the law-stationer, the usurer, suitors of every description, hunters of the law courts and their victims, live and move round about the life of the chief persons in the tale, and exercise almost insensibly, but very certainly, a continual influence upon them.²⁹³

It is to this view of the thematic coherence in *Bleak House* that later critics turn. In praising Dickens's use of unifying symbolism in the novel, Edmund Wilson recognizes how every important element in the story is "involved in the exasperating Chancery suit."²⁹⁴

Forster must be credited with a remarkable insight for recognizing this symbolic significance of the function of Chancery about a century ago when many could hardly think of it.

But Forster's was a lonely voice among contemporaries. Most reviewers thought that Dickens's plots were clumsy and ineffective. *The Critic*, which

²⁹³*The Examiner*, 8 October 1853, p.164.

²⁹⁴Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," in *The Wound and the Bow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp.35-38.

admired Dickens for the Chancery topic, failed to perceive its symbolic relevance to the plot. The reviewer observed:

The story of Lady Dedlock, on which the plot mainly turns, is . . . improbable, not to say revolting, and in its conception sins against one of the first laws of novel-writing. It is a prime canon of fiction that all its main incidents should arise during the course of its evolution; and in all cases where this law is broken, the moment the incident is guessed, the reader sees, 'as from a tower, end of all', and half the interest is gone.

The writer then drew a comparison between Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In Sophocles, he pointed out, the crime to be expiated is a thing of the past and "the play is little else than a slow and painful unrolling of an old and forgotten crime," whereas in *Macbeth* one is able to see the struggle between destiny and free-will and "applaud the retribution because we have seen man consciously succumbing to the temptations of the powers of darkness." The writer found a resemblance between *Bleak House* and Sophocles's tragedy, both of which, he felt, were much inferior to *Macbeth*. Again, compared with Mrs. Dombey, he found Lady Dedlock much inferior because of her failure to arouse any "artistic

interest." "Both are sinners; but in Mrs. Dombey's case we are distinctly cognisant of the struggle and the fault, and its record thus acquires a tragic interest. But Lady Dedlock is haunted, like poor Oedipus, by the ghost of a youthful crime, and poetical justice would be satisfied with a much less severe punishment than hers . . . " ²⁹⁵

The argument seems odd; but critics of fiction in those days obviously demanded that the novelist should build up his story on an intricate plot which would gradually unfold its secrets and mysteries. As the critic of the *Bentley's Monthly Review* remarked, only in one instance, in the murder of Tulkinghorn, had Dickens succeeded in giving a sense of "real mystery." Since the first impression is that Lady Dedlock is the criminal, the reader is taken by surprise when it is revealed that the actual murderer is the French waiting-woman. But the reviewer was not convinced by the motive. "It is entirely unnatural. The very reason why our suspicions never turn toward Madmoiselle Hortense is because she has no adequate motive for the commission of the act, and therefore she ought not (artistically speaking) to have been guilty of it."

This critic also accused Dickens of assuming

an air of mystery, as if he had something

wonderful in the background; but we smile at

²⁹⁵*The Critic*, 15 September 1853, p.490.

the futile attempt at concealment, and 'see it all' as plainly as if we had been able to dip into the last chapter before the first six had been published. In *Bleak House*, for example, everyone knows from the first that Esther Summerson is the daughter of Lady Dedlock, and that the wretched law-writer is her ladyship's *quondam* lover. We are inclined to suspect that Mr. Dickens really meant these two facts to be great secrets, which the seventeenth and eighteenth numbers were to reveal; but we are confident that not one of his readers had the least doubt on the subject after the second or third appearance on the scene of the characters in question.²⁹⁶

The critic of *The Illustrated London News* suspected that Dickens was perhaps aware of his deficiency and in order to overcome this he always resorted to

a thousand artifices to excite curiosity . . . He has the art of exciting the most lively expectations; he has the art of sustaining them. Renewal upon renewal he obtains from these literary bills, during the whole progress of the story's existence; and when it dies, there are not assets found to pay half-a-crown

²⁹⁶Dyson, pp.65-66.

in twenty shillings.

The critic cited examples of the lawyer and the Detective Officer. Mr. Tulkinghorn is said to be invested with a thousand family secrets; Mr. Bucket is shown to be cunning enough to find out anything. But when the reader closes the book, he finds that he has been cheated--the author has not unfolded to him anything that he has not known or already anticipated.²⁹⁷

Some reviewers were not happy with the conclusion of the novel in the double number. In Number XVII, when there was an indication that the story was fast drawing to a close, the readers expected a usual happy ending to the novel. *The Observer* had pointed out:

. . . the guilty are on the point of being duly punished; while virtue, of course, being its own exceeding great reward, "will have to look to itself for compensation."²⁹⁸

Rewarding the virtuous and punishing the evil ones was the conventional mode of ending a novel. But when *Bleak House* ended in a different way, the readers felt rather uneasy. The reviewer of *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* was so displeased with the ending that he wondered with sarcasm whether the novel was not "quite original" in this respect. He could not understand why Dickens

²⁹⁷*Illustrated London News*, 24 September 1853, reprinted in Dyson, pp.60-61.

²⁹⁸*The Observer* 3 July 1853, p.6.

waited until the last chapters to develop the love theme between Esther and Allan Woodcourt. Taken aback by such a conclusion, the reviewer said, ". . . the winding up of the story is lame, confused, and hurried altogether."²⁹⁹

The reader, of course, had glimpses of Woodcourt from time to time; the news of his shipwreck, his return from India, and his treatment of Jo, Richard Carstone and Jenny served as foreshadowings. But one has to admit that Dickens does not provide a sufficient hint to his serial readers from either Esther or Woodcourt of their continuing emotional attachment to each other.

Moreover, as *The Morning Chronicle* pointed out, Dickens presented his novel as a story of suspense and mystery throughout. Therefore the conclusion was "somewhat humdrum" and not "true to nature." The reviewer said:

A romance such as *Bleak House* cannot be perfectly natural, in the sense of actual life. Its writer is compelled to assume a knowledge of motives and thoughts which is, in itself, supernatural; and the laws of dramatic proportion demand that this limited supernaturalism should last to the end, and deal out--not perhaps what is called "poetic

²⁹⁹*Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 11 September 1853, p.6.

justice," to all parties--but at least such visible results of what they have done for the weal or woe of their fellow creatures as shall be consistent with the strong electric light which is thrown upon the earlier stages of their career. For a graceful but monotonous tale of true love, running smooth and somewhat namby-pamby, "adapted to the young"--for a polemical tale in red or dark-blue cloth, in which, as it may be, Calvin, or Hooker, or Liguori finds himself distilled in homoeopathic doses from the lips of budding Christians and Ediths--the conclusion of "Bleak House" might have been adequate; but for a tale of life-long concealment--of spontaneous combustion--of seduction and murder--of flight, disguise and death--we can but say that we are greatly disappointed . . . ³⁰⁰

This comment is interesting in the light of present-day discussions of the ending of *Bleak House*. The controversy over the adequacy of the ending still persists.³⁰¹ The Victorian critic made an important

³⁰⁰*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1853, p.7.

³⁰¹See Barbara Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens: Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.13-14; Richard J. Dunn, "Far, Far Better Things: Dickens' Later Endings," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 7(1978), 221-35; John Kucich, "Action in the Dickens Ending: *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 33(1978), 88-109.

distinction: he would accept an unconventional ending in a serious tale published as a single volume, but in a serial novel like *Bleak House*, where the author is bound by the requirement of holding the interest of his readers with suspense, intrigues, murders, and sensational melodrama, a conventional ending would be appropriate. From the contemporary point of view, therefore, the critic was right in saying, "The last number of 'Bleak House' is very far from being an adequate conclusion to a story so artfully wrought up to such a pitch of melodramatic interest."³⁰²

³⁰²*The Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1853, p.7.

VII. Conclusion

It has been recognized by critics then and now that in *Bleak House* Dickens demonstrates a remarkable skill in narrative technique--it is, in fact, the first novel of his maturity. Critics also agree that *Bleak House* is "in some respects, the worst of Mr. Dickens's fictions, but, in many more it is the best."³⁰³ Moreover, as *The Westminster Review* observed, the novel gave the contemporaries "much opportunity to make exception against this point or that, yet in none that he has ever written, does there appear so great a maturity of power."³⁰⁴ In this study, I have tried to demonstrate that the contemporaneous implications and interests of *Bleak House* are better understood and appreciated when it is read in instalment form as it was originally published, and when its reviews are examined part by part as they appeared during the course of the novel's serialization from February 1852 to September 1853. I have also tried to indicate that a study of these reviews helps us to reinterpret Dickens's craftsmanship

³⁰³*Bentley's Miscellany*, October 1853, p.372. In a similar pronouncement, the modern critic, J. Hillis Miller, finds *Bleak House* "a powerful book, an extraordinary work of Dickens's creative power. It is also to some degree a painful book" because of its failings. J. Hillis Miller, "Introduction," *Bleak House*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1971), p.33.

³⁰⁴*Westminster Review*, October 1853, p.591.

in *Bleak House*.

Critics who reviewed *Bleak House* in parts were in a disadvantageous position--they had to analyze the novel while the author's ideas were at different stages of development. But as can be seen from the study, some of the reviewers showed remarkable perception in their analytical judgments of particular parts available before them. In contrast to those who reviewed the novel after its serialization was completed, these critics concentrated on analyzing specific details of the novel's structure and social issues. Instead of commenting in a general way, as the later critics did, that Dickens exaggerated in his characterization or that his plot failed, the reviewers of the serial parts tried to point out exactly where Dickens went wrong or where he excelled.

They raised questions such as why Skimpole had suddenly changed his first name from Harold to Leonard in Number X; why Dickens had disappointed his readers by depriving them of witnessing the trial of Hortense; whether his reputation as the editor of *Household Word* did not contribute to the commercial success of *Bleak House*. When *David Copperfield* was published, some readers thought it was autobiographical. Could it be that Dickens wanted to forestall a similar charge by making the first-person narrator of *Bleak House* a young woman? These critics did not hesitate to tell Dickens

that they disapproved of the abrupt transition between Chapters 2 and 3 in Number I; that they enjoyed imagining Mrs. Jellyby presiding over the women's meetings at Strafford House; that they were not happy with the ending of the novel. Questions and responses like these are helpful in reevaluating the structural pattern of the novel.

It is commonly believed that the contemporary critics of *Bleak House* talked only about its plot, characters and social criticism; that they failed to recognize "the interrelation of these factors one to another."³⁰⁵ This study proves otherwise. A careful examination of all the available reviews which appeared in the daily, weekly and monthly newspapers and periodicals shows that the contemporary critics were not blind either to the metaphorical significance of the spontaneous combustion episode, or to the unifying symbolism of the Chancery suit. They could also recognize Dickens's artistry in intensifying the psychological dilemma in Esther's mind at the revelation of her relationship with Lady Dedlock, and in portraying the agony of the good old baronet, Sir Leicester Dedlock, at the discovery of his beloved wife's pre-marital affair.

³⁰⁵A.E. Dyson, "Introduction," *Dickens: Bleak House: A Casebook*, (London: Macmillan, 1969), p.13.

It might be asked whether these criticisms had any effect on the structure of *Bleak House*. As we have seen, Dickens raised several controversial issues in the novel--spontaneous combustion, the Skimpole-Hunt scandal, and the satire on foreign missions and women's movements. To Lewes's objection to Krook's unscientific death, Dickens provided a rejoinder in Number XI with facts and figures. This unusual course, however, did not have any effect on the structure or characterization in the novel. The Skimpole-Hunt scandal, discussed in Chapter 4 of this study, did not evoke any provocative response during the serialization of the novel. The scandal, which became a private joke, stimulated the readership-interest in the character; it did not affect the writer. It is, however, not known whether Dickens would have either dropped or changed the character if the scandal had sparked off public controversy while the novel was in progress.

The satire on philanthropic and women's movements prompted immediate angry retorts from Lord Denman and silent disapproval from others like Lord Shaftesbury. I think that this unfavourable reception had some restraining effect on Dickens's exuberance in the portrayal of Mrs. Jellyby in the second half of the novel. The reference to Mrs. Jellyby in *The Times* must have flattered Dickens, and there was an excellent opportunity for him to enlarge on the theme in

Chapter 47 on "Jo's Will." Mrs. Jellyby does appear again, once in Chapter 38, and finally in Chapter 67, but only casually. The other philanthropists--the Pardiggles, Mr. Quale, and Miss Wisk are dropped after the tenth number, and there is no more pungent satire on foreign missions in the rest of the novel.

An analysis of the novel part by part reveals that Dickens planned the structure and theme of *Bleak House* very carefully. He encountered only one initial problem at the beginning; in Number I he fell short by about five pages. He had returned to writing a serial instalment fifteen months after the publication of the last number of *David Copperfield*; obviously, he had made a wrong calculation of his hand-written sheets. But he handled the situation so deftly that it took Dickens critics more than a century to find that a whole chapter was interpolated very near the beginning of the novel. During serialization, Dickens showed a complete control of his pre-conceived plan of the novel; so much so, that even a serious illness, and the distractions it caused, could not have any visible effect on the progress of the novel. It also becomes evident that unlike other serial writers, Dickens did not have to rely on cliff-hangers or join the instalments by presenting the central character in every episode--the structure of his serial was firmly based on a complex plot. Dickens devised a unique

structural pattern to achieve, on the one hand, a continuous readership interest, and on the other, a thematic unity of the whole novel. Experience taught him that he could sustain the interest of his readers successfully by intensifying the action of the novel in each quarter of its serial structure--in Numbers V and XV, and by concentrating heavily in the middle numbers. The structure was so carefully organized that though in certain numbers the reader might feel the narrative to be dull, the dullness was never allowed to continue indefinitely to precipitate a situation such as had occurred with *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

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APPENDIX

BLEAK HOUSE.

353

never can advance my welfare by such means. You may, perhaps, have abandoned this project a long time. If so, excuse my giving you unnecessary trouble. If not, I entreat you, on the assurance I have given you, henceforth to lay it aside. I beg you to do this, for my peace."

I must say for Mr. Guppy that the shuffling manner he had had upon him improved very much. He seemed truly glad to be able to do something I asked, and he looked ashamed.

"If you will allow me to finish what I have to say at once, so that I may have no occasion to resume," I went on, seeing him about to speak, "you will do me a kindness, Mr. Guppy. I come to you as privately as possible, because you announced this impression of yours to me in a confidence which I have really wished to respect—and which I always have respected, as you remember. I have mentioned my illness. There really is no reason why I should hesitate to say that I know very well that any little delicacy I might have had in making a request to you, is quite removed. Therefore I make the entreaty I have now preferred; and I hope you will have sufficient consideration for me to accede to it."

I must do Mr. Guppy the further justice of saying that he had looked more and more ashamed, and that he looked most ashamed, and very earnest, when he now replied with a burning face :

"Upon my word and honor, upon my life, upon ~~my~~ ^{my} soul, Miss Summerson, as I am a living man, I'll act according to your wish. I'll never go another step in opposition to it. I'll take my oath to it, if it will be any satisfaction to you. In what I promise at this present time touching the matters now in question, I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so —"

"I am quite satisfied," said I, rising at this point, "and I thank you very much. ♦♦Caddy, my dear, I am ready!"

Mr. Guppy's mother returned with Caddy, now making me the recipient of her silent laughter and her nudges, and we took our leave. Mr. Guppy saw us to the door with the air of one who was ~~un-~~ imperfectly awake or walking in his sleep, and we left him there, staring.

But in a minute he came after us down the street without any hat, and with his long hair all blown about, and stopped us, saying fervently:

"Miss Summerson, upon my honor and soul, you may depend upon me."

"I do," said I, quite confidently.

He ran home and came running back again.

"Touching that ~~other~~ matter, you know, I really and truly am very sorry that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, should prevent a renewal of what was wholly terminated some time back," said Mr. Guppy in a forlorn manner, "but it couldn't be. Now *could* it, you know! I only put it to you."

I replied it certainly could not. The subject did not admit of a doubt. He thanked me, and ran to his mother's again—and back again.

"It ~~was~~ very honorable of you, miss, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy. "If an altar could be erected in the bowers of friendship. But, upon my soul, you may rely upon me in every respect, save and except the tender passion: ~~you may indeed!~~"

[illegible]

404

BLEAK HOUSE.

(she was very firm)

for the firmest of us to be always guarded. There was ~~some~~ domestic trouble and amazement, you may suppose; I leave you to imagine, Sir Leicester, the husband's grief. But that is not ~~my~~ present point. When Mr. Rouncewell's townsman heard of the disclosure, he no more allowed the girl to be patronised and honored, than he would have suffered her to be trodden underfoot before his eyes. Such was his pride, that he indignantly took her away, as ~~if~~ from reproach and disgrace. He had no sense of the honor done him and his daughter by the lady's condescension; not the least. He resented the girl's position, as if the lady had been the commonest of commoners. That the story. I hope Lady Dedlock will excuse its painful nature."

There are various opinions on the merits, more or less conflicting with Volumnia's. That fair young creature ~~can~~ believe there ever was any such lady, and rejects the whole history on the threshold. The majority incline to the Debilitated cousin's sentiment, which is in few words—"no business—Rouncewell's fernal townsman." Sir Leicester generally refers back in his mind to Wat Tyler, and arranges a sequence of events on a plan of his own.

There is not much conversation in all, for late hours have been kept at Chesney Wold since the necessary expenses elsewhere began, and this is the first night in many on which the family have been alone. It is past ten when Sir Leicester begs Mr. Tulkinghorn to ring for candles. Then the stream of moonlight has swelled into a lake, and then Lady Dedlock for the first time moves, and rises, and comes forward to a table for a glass of water. Winking cousins, bat-like in the candle glare, crowd round to give it; Volumnia (always ready for something better if procurable) takes another, a ~~weak~~ sip of which contents her; Lady Dedlock, graceful, self-possessed, looked after by admiring eyes, passes away slowly by the side of that Nymph down the long perspective, not at all improving her as a question of contrast.

(Sunlit - manage to bring this down, as I would rather not write more in. It can be easily done by bringing the previous chapter over, a little. cd)

To me too," said Richard, thoughtfully.

"If the Lord Chancellor would decide against my interest as far as that is concerned, or at least would say I was only entitled to — how much could you and I live upon, Esther?" said Ada, blushing.

"No!" cried Richard, "he had better decide against me. I can go anywhere—go for a soldier, if that's all, and never be missed. I would sell my best chance, if I could, on the shortest notice and the lowest terms."

"And go abroad?" said Ada.

"Yes!"

"India, perhaps?"

"Why yes, I think so," returned Richard. "What do you think?"

"I have not thought about it," said Ada. "I am only sorry that I

should be the enemy—as I suppose I am—of a great number of relations and others/ and that they should be my enemies—as I suppose they are# and that we should all be ruining one another/ without knowing how or why, and be in constant doubt and discord all our lives. It seems very strange, as there must be right somewhere, that an honest judge in real earnest has not been able to find out through all these years where it is."

"Ah, cousin!" said Richard. "Strange, indeed! all this ~~was of~~ wanton chess-playing is very strange. To see that composed Court yesterday jogging on so serene, and to think of the wretchedness of the pieces on the board, gave me the headache and the heartache both together. My head ached with wondering how it happened/ if men were neither fools nor rascals/ and my heart ached to think they could possibly be either. But at all events, Ada—I may call you Ada."

"Of course you may, cousin Richard."

"At all events, Ada, Chancery will work none of its bad influence on us. We have happily been brought together, thanks to our good kinsman, and it can't divide us now!"

"Never, I hope, cousin Richard!" said Ada, gently.

Miss Jellyby gave my arm a squeeze, and me a very significant look. I smiled in return, and we made the rest of the way back very pleasantly.

In half-an-hour after our arrival, Mrs. Jellyby appeared/ and in the course of an hour the various things necessary for breakfast straggled one by one into the dining-room. I do not doubt that Mrs. Jellyby had gone to bed, and got up in the usual manner, but she presented no appearance of having changed her dress. She was greatly occupied during breakfast/ for the morning's post brought a heavy correspondence relative to Borrioboola-Gha, which would occasion her (she said) to pass a busy day. The children tumbled about, and notched memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress; and ~~Bill~~ was lost for an hour and a half, and brought home from Newgate market by a policeman. The equable manner in which Mrs. Jellyby sustained both his absence/ and his restoration to the family circle/ surprised us all.

She was by that time perseveringly dictating to Caddy, and Caddy was fast relapsing into the inky condition in which we had found her. At one o'clock an open carriage arrived for us, and a cart for our luggage. Mrs. Jellyby charged us with many remembrances to her good friend, Mr. Jarndyce; Caddy left her desk to see us depart, kissed me in the

"When I saw her yesterday for the first time——" I was going to answer.

"For the first time only yesterday. This is delightful!" he cried with enthusiasm. "We are escaping from the counting-house world into the happy golden age. Cold forms are vanishing. I am growing young again!"

"Indeed," said I, "it is very pleasant to think how sure the influence of such beauty and such gentleness together——"

"Yes," he repeated, with the happy tears in his eyes, "together."

"—How sure their influence is. Yesterday seems to me quite a long time ago. If we were to be separated to-morrow, I should feel, I think, as if I had to contend with the impressions of years instead of hours. I hope," I added, suddenly remembering how clever he was, "that it is not foolish to say so."

He kissed my hand with quite a child's gallantry, and replied with such fervor and earnestness, and was so familiarly eloquent upon youth, and grace, and loveliness, and upon their influences expanding like circles in the water, or sounds in the air, that I could have listened for an hour.

"We will not," he added, "call such a lovely young creature as that, who is a joy to all mankind, an orphan. She is the child of the universe."

Mr. Jarndyce, I found, was standing near us, with his hands behind him, and an attentive smile upon his face.

"The universe," he observed, "makes rather an indifferent parent, I am afraid."

"I don't know!" said Mr. Skimpole, buoyantly.

"I think I do," said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Well!" cried Mr. Skimpole, "you know the world (which in your sense is the universe), and I know nothing of it, so you shall have your way. But if I had mine," glancing at the cousins, "there should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with dewy roses; it should lie through sunny bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never wither it. The base word money should never be breathed near it!"

Mr. Jarndyce patted him on the head with a smile, as if he had been really a child, and passing a step or two on, and stopping a moment, glanced at the young cousins. His look was thoughtful, but had a benignant expression in it which I often (how often!) saw again: which has long been engraven on my heart. The room in which they were, communicating with that in which he stood, was only lighted by the fire. Ada sat at the piano; Richard stood beside her, bending down. Upon the wall, their shadows blended together, surrounded by strange forms, not without a ghostly motion caught from the unsteady fire, though reflected from motionless objects. Ada touched the notes so softly, and sang so low, that the wind, sighing to the distant hills, was as audible as the music. The mystery of the future, and the little clue afforded to it by the voice of the present, seemed expressed in the whole picture.

But it is not to recal this fancy, well as I remember it, that I recal the scene. First, I was not quite unconscious of the contrast, in respect of meaning and intention, between the silent look directed that way, and the flow of words that had preceded it. Secondly, though Mr. Jarndyce's

DICKENS'S NUMBER-PLANS

(No I--right-hand side)

(Bleak House ~~and the East Wind~~ No I)

Chapter I.

In Chancery

The great cause of Jarndyce and Jarndyce

Chapter II.

In ~~the fashionable world~~ fashion

Lady Dedlock. Open country house picture

Law writer.

Chapter III Sir Leicester Dedlock
Mr. Tulkinghornmoment
work up from this

A Progress.

Esther Summerson.

Lady Dedlock's child.

Chapter ~~III~~.IV.

Telescopic Philanthropy

The two wards, the subjects of the unhappy story of
Jarndyce and Jarndyce

Richard Carstone

Ada

Mrs. Jellyby. Her daughter Caddy Jellyby. The children
& household

(No II--left-hand side)

Introduce the old Marine store Dealer who has the papers

Bleak House and John Jarndyce.

Leonard Skimpole

Foreshadowing Legend of the country house

Mrs. Rouncewell--two sons

Grandson Watt

Rosa

(No II--right-hand side)

(Bleak House and the East Wind No II.)

Chapter V.

A Morning Adventure.

Chapter VI.

Quite at home.

Chapter VII.

The Ghost's Walk.

(No III--left-hand side)

mems.

Richard and Ada--love. Yes. Slightly

Miss Jellyby? No

Nemo? Yes

New people--Mrs. Pardiggle--New traits in Richard

yes

Yes--slightly

Coavinses? No.

(No III--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No III.)

Chapter VIII.

Covering a Multitude of Sins.

Chapter IX.

Signs and Tokens.

Chapter X.

The Law-Writer

(No IV--left-hand side)

	<u>Harmonic Meeting-room</u>	
<u>Coroner's Inquest.</u>	<u>Little Cheeks</u>	<u>the comic</u>
	<u>Swills</u>	<u>vocalist</u>

<u>Beadle</u>	<u>Boy. Jo.</u>
<u>Coroner</u>	
<u>Picture</u>	<u>churchyard & broom</u>
<u>Chesney Wold</u>	
<u>Rosa & Watt?</u>	<u>Yes. Slightly.</u>
<u>Esther.</u>	<u>Carry on Carry on</u>
<u>Miss Jellyby?</u>	<u>No.</u>

(No IV--right-hand side)

Bleak House No IV.)

Chapter XI.

On the Watch

country house--clear, cold day

riding from Paris home

Brilliant and distinguished circle
Boodle

French Lady's maid. and
Buffy

Mr. Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock. Each watching the other.
Open that interest and
leave them so

Chapter III.

Esther's Narrative.

(No V--left-hand side)

Richard. No.

Miss Jellyby? Yes. Dancing Master's son.

Joe Jo? Yes

Snagsby? No

The Brickmaker's Family? No
Allan Woodcourt.

Coavinses? Yes.
John
George
Miles
Edmund
Leonard

Skimpole and Bovthorn brought together? Next time
Miss Flite's friends?--Her birds? Yes slightly.The
birds. Not the
friends.

Old Turveydrop--Pathetic too--blesses people--My son! &c
"I have forgotten to mention again--at least, I have not
mentioned--"

(No V--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No V.)

Chapter XIV.

Deportment.

Mr. Turveydrop. Prince Turveydrop.
George the Fourth, Old Turveydrop's
model of

Deportment

Chapter XV.

Bell Yard

Skimpole - Coavinses -

Charley, working for the rest
"only a follerer"

Gridley, the man from Shropshire

Skimpole delighted. Employed Coavinses.

Chapter XVI

Tom-All-Alone's

Tom-All-Alone's the ruined property in Jarndyce & Jarndyce.
already described by Mr. Jarndyce.

The Dedlock gout--family gout

Jo. Shadowing forth of Lady Dedlock at the churchyard.

Pointing hand of Allegory--consecrated ground
"Is it Blessed?"

(No. VI--left-hand side)

Bayham Badgers? Yes. To introduce Richard's
unreliability

Richard? Yes. Carry through, his character--developing
itself.

Boythorn and Skimpole. Yes. Not much

Rosa & Ir and Watt? Slightly

Mrs. Rouncewell? No

My lady's maid? Slightly

Mr. Guppy? Yes.

Snagsby? Yes. Carry through.

(No VI--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No VI.)

Chapter XVII.

Esther's Narrative.

Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy, & Professor Bingo
Geological hammer

Richard "O! It's all right enough. Let us talk about
something else"

Allan Woodcourt

Esther

The flowers. Does it look like that sort of thing?"

Chapter XVIII "Why, rather like"

my dear

Lady Dedlock

Down at Boythorn's in the high summertime
old garden wall

The little church in the Park--Lady Dedlock & Esther

storm. Esther supposed to speak--but Dedlock

Hortense. walking barefoot home

Chapter XIX

Moving on

The great remedy for Jo, and all such as he. Move on!

Mr. and Mrs. Chadband (Mistress Rachael). Can we

fly my friends? We cannot. And why can we not fly my friends?"

&c &c

a man with a good deal of train oil in his composition

Closing picture on the bridge

Golden Cross of St Pauls

--so high up--so far off--

(No VII--left-hand side)

Mems.

Mr. Guppy--His mother? Not yet

Mr. Krook Yes

The Turveydrops.No.Next time

Tom All-Alone's.Do.Yes.

Miss Flite--Her friend? Not yet

The Brickmaker's family? Slightly

Gridley? Very slightly

Mr. Tulkinghorn? Carry on

mems: for future

Mr. Tulkinghorn finds Joe--hearing from Mr. Snagsby what

he said there--and gets him to identify Lady Dedlock

Tony Jobling in his lodging, mistaken for the dead lodger

Has Lady Dedlock's picture among the Galaxy Gallery

(No VII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No VII.)

Chapter XX.

A New Lodger

Mr. Guppy's friend who went over Chesney Wold with him, gets
established at Krook's.

Tony Jobling--Assumed name

Owen
Weevle.

Mr. Smallweed (Ancient Office-lad)

Slap-Bang Dinner

"There are chords."

Krook getting on

Thank you Guppy. I dont
know but what I will take

Chapter XXI a--" &c

The Smallweed Family

No childhood--no amusements.

old man--old woman--old grandchildren

Cushion. You're a brimstone chatterer.

Trooper. Shooting Gallery

Phil Squod.

Chapter XXII

Mr. Bucket

Mr. Snagsby--Detective officer

Frenchwoman Jo.

"That there's the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd."

(No VIII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No VIII.)

Chapter XXIII.

Esther's Narrative

French Maid-- eo

Richard. Downward Progress. Jarndyce & Jarndyce
The Army

Caddy Jellyby's engagement--Mr. Turveydrop--"My children you
shall always live with me"--meaning, I shall always live with you

Mrs. Jellyby.

Charley Esther's maid

Chapter XXIV.

An Appeal Case.

Richard. Engagement off.

Gridley taken refuge with the trooper.

Gridley's death Bucket.

The shadow of Miss Flite on Richard

Chapter XXV

Mrs. Snagsby sees it all.Mrs. Snagsby becomes jealous--Mr. Snagsby must be
that boy's father.

Sets herself to watch him at all times

Let all concerned in any secresy, Beware!

(Guster pities Jo--so like him in the first part of her fortunes)

(No IX--left-hand side)

Mems.Boythorn?Skimpole?Hortense?Sir Leicester?Lady Dedlock?Mr. Guppy?Mr. Weevle?The SmallweedsMrs. Rouncewell's other son, or Watt, or Rosa?--Yes.

(No IX--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No IX.)

Chapter XXVI.

Sharpshooters

Shooting Gallery. George washing--and Phil

Visitors--Mr. Smallweed and Judy

Your Brimstone Grandmother

For any writing of Captain Hawdon's

So to Mr. Tulkinghorn's

Chapter XXVI.

More old Soldiers than one.

Mr. Tulkinghorn's room

George and the boxes. Strong box.

Matthew Bagnet. Mrs. Bagnet. Quebec and Malta, and
Young Woolwich

Discipline must be maintained Tell him my opinion, old girl
a threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow.

Chapter XXVIII.

The Ironmaster

Chesney Wold and the cousins

Mrs. Rouncewell's other son. Watt and Rosa.

Chapter XXIX.

The Young Man.

Mr. Guppy waits on Lady Dedlock. She finds that Esther is her
child. Guppy to bring ~~Kro~~ Krook's papers from the old portmanteau

(No X--left-hand side)

Richard? No

Caddy Jellyby's marriage? Yes.

Brickmaker's family?

Charley's illness Yes.

Dawn of Esther's

Krook's death? Yes

Miss Flite? Yes. Carry Alan Woodcourt through, by her

Connect Esther & Jo? Yes.

----- Mrs. Snagsby?

Esther's love must be kept in view, to make the
coming trial the greater as and the victory
the more meritorious.

(No X--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No X.)

Chapter XXX.

Esther's Narrative.

Mrs. Woodcourt.

Caddy Jellyby's marriage.

No East Wind with the little Woman

Chapter XXXI.

Nurse and Patient.

JO begin the illnesses from him. His disappearance

Then, Charley ill

Then, Esther

Ada

Kee "She will try to make her way into the room. Keep her out!"

"For I cannot see you Charley--I am blind"

Chapter XXXII.

The appointed time.

Weevle uneasiness

Snagsby

Guppy and Weevle--soot--oil from the window

all Injustice, and wrong--"Spontaneous Combustion
and no other death."

(No XI--left-hand side)

Richard--No.

Mrs. Bucket No.

Smallweed progress--Tulkinghorn--George & Bagnet.

Yes

Hortense and Tulkinghorn? No

(No XI--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XI.)

Chapter XXXIII.

Interlopers.

The Court, under the excitement

Krook Mrs. Smallweed's brother. Smallweeds
take possession

Lady Dedlock--the young man--and the old man.

Chapter XXXIV.

A turn of the Screw

By old Smallweed & Mr. Tulkinghorn

The Bagnets

Mr. George sees his mother.

Young Woolwich

Chapter XXXV.

Esther's Narrative.

Her illness and gradual recovery

Necklace and the beads

Looking glass taken
away.

~~Chapter XXXVI.~~

Work in Richard and the love

"And now I must tell the little secret."

(No XII--left-hand side)

Bring out Skimpole? Yes

Lady Dedlock. To begin with?--Yes.

(No XII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XII.)

Chapter XXXVI.

Chesney Wold.

Esther & Charley at Mr. Boythorn's.

Interview with her mother

The Ghost's Walk

Meeting with Ada.

Chapter XXXVII.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce

Richard's progress distrust of Mr. Jarndyce naturally
engendered by the suit.

Mr. Vholes supp Emma, Jane, and

Caroline Vholes--Supports aged father in the Vale of Taunton
Driven away to Jarndyce & Jarndyce

Chapter XXXVIII. Close with that

A Struggle

Dancing apprentices. remind Caddy of "the Sweeps"

Mr. Guppy's mother's

"You wouldn't object to admit that, Miss, perhaps?"

Mr. Guppy's contention with his legal and illegal
angels

(No XIII--left-hand side)

Krook's cat. Yes.

The Smallweeds, in connexion with the house in the Court. Yes

Sir Leicester Dedlock?--And the cousins? Yes

Lady Dedlock? Yes

Finds that Mr. Tulkinghorn has discovered her secret? Yes.

Their interview at night, at Chesney Wold? Yes

Wind up with Esther's Narrative?

No. French woman. Lay
that ground.

(No XIII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XIII.)

Chapter XXXIX.

Attorney and client.

Vholes Symond's Inn

The respectability of the Vholes legion. Make man-eating unlawful, and you starve the Vholeses.

Richard's decline--Carry on.

Guppy and Tony--Court--Smallweeds in possession.

Carry on to next.

Chapter XL.

National and Domestic.

Coodle and Doodle. No Govt without Coodle or Doodle only two men in the country.

Volumina. Debilitated cousin. Country house

--Electioneering. Sir Leicester--658 gentleman in a bad way.

Carry through Rouncewell and Rosa, to Tulkinghorn's story.
So to next.

Chapter XLI.

In Mr. Tulkinghorn's room

Tul Tulkinghorn's room at night. Lady Dedlock comes to him there.

Begin grim shadow on him

Chapter XLII.

In Mr. Tulkinghorn's chambers.

Lincoln's Inn Fields--Tulkinghorn coming back at night--London

bird. Begin with Snagsby, and
work up to

Frenchwoman.

(No XIV--left-hand side)

Mr. and Mrs. Chandband? No

Allan Woodcourt? Yes. Return

Skimpole--family? Yes.

Boythorn--about him, but not himself

Mr. Jarndyce. Yes--And his love for Esther to be now
brought out

George and Bagnets? No. Next No

(No XIV--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XIV.)

Chapter XLIII.

Esther's Narrative.

Skimpole family at home--borders of Somers Town Polygon

Beauty Daughter, Sentiment Daughter, Comedy Daughter

Angry baker--such an absurd figure.

Sir Leicester calls at on Mr. Jarndyce.

Esther takes "Guardian, Lady Dedlock is my mother.
through Skimpole
Boythorn and Miss
Barbary

Chapter XLIV.

The Letter and the Answer.

Send Charley "for the letter."

I have brought the answer Guardian."

Chapter XLV.

In trust

Esther to--Plymouth--no--Deal. Ada's letter.

Allan Woodcourt comes back

Glad to be thought of like the dead

Chapter XLVI.

Stop him!

Tom-All-Alone's. Night and morning.

Allan--Jenny--Jo--

Jo tells that he was taken away
by Mr. Bucket Allan takes him

(No XV--left-hand side)

Mr. Tulkinghorn to be shot. Pointing Roman

George to be taken by Bucket. Yes.

Jo? Yes. Kill him.

Allan?--and Richard? Not Richard

Mr. Guppy? No.

Smallweeds? NO.

Lead up to murder through Chesney Wold? No. Through
house in town.

Mrs. Bucket? No

Snagsby? Mr. Slightly

Chadbands? Not yet.

(No XV--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XV.)

Chapter XLVII

Jo's Will

Esther.

""If it could be written very large as I didn't go to do it--"

Our father

Dead my Lords and gentlemen

Chapter XLVIII

Closing in

Gather up Ironmaster and Rosa

Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn

If it said now, Don't go home! High and mighty street.

Shot.

Pointing Roman

Chapter XLIX

Dutiful Friendship

The old girl's birthday.

George

Mr. Bucket

Making things pleasant

Hundred Pound reward--Sir Leicester--

George taken

Handcuffs--and had over his eyes

(No XVI--left-hand side)

Ada and Richard? Yes married

Esther and Allan? Yes. Carry on gently

Lady Dedlock? do

Mr. George. Yes.

Sir Leicester? Very little. reserve for next time. Hold him in.

Boythorn? In connexion with Lady Dedlock?

No.

(No XVI--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XVI.)

Chapter L.

Esther's Narrative.

Caddy Jellyby--~~911~~

and a poor little child

Esther there constantly--Work in Woodcourt

observes Ada changing.

"Still the same shadow of my darling"

Chapter LI.

Enlightened.

Allan Woodcourt. Vholes

Richard living in--Cursitor Street? Carey Street? Dyer's
Buildings? Symond's Inn

Not going home, my dear, any more. Richard is my dear husband!

Esther "Bleak House is thinning fast Little Woman!"

Chapter LII.

Obstinacy.

Mr. George in prison

object to the breed Sir

old girl and Mrs. Rouncewell

Chapter LIII.

The Track

Disconsolate coaches

Bucket & Sir Leicester--Volumnia & debilitated cousin.

Bucket & Mercury.

(No XVII--left-hand side)

Guppy? Yes.

And Weevle? No.

Smallweeds? Grandfather.

The Chadbands? Yes.

(No XVII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XVII.)

Chapter LIV.

Springing a Mine.

Bucket & Sir Leicester.

So to the Chadbands, Smallweed, Mrs. Snagsby

Disclosure of the murder. Madlle Hortense taken.

"My Lodger." all in Bucket's hands

Sir Leicester swoons--compassionate and
sorrowful. not angry.

Chapter LV.

Flight.

Mrs. Rouncewell & the old girl.

George and his mother. His brother.

Mrs. Rouncewell & Lady Dedlock. Mr. Guppy

"My enemy alive and dead"--Hunted, she flies

Chapter LVI.

Pursuit.

Sir Leicester ill. To him, Mr. Bucket. "Save her."

Hurry, in pursuit. Handkerchief. Takes Esther

with him. Hurry, hurry!

(No XVIII--left-hand side)

All Esther's Narrative? No.

Pursuit interest sustained throughout

Ending with the churchyard gate, and Lady Dedlock

lying dead upon the step.

Mr. Bucket and Esther.

Snagsby's and Guster? Yes.

Mr. Boythorn? No.

Allan Woodcourt? Yes.

Explain the change of clothes or leave it? Explain it at the last.

(No XVIII--right-hand side)

(Bleak House No XVIII.)

Chapter LVII.

Esther's Narrative.

Journey through the snow. Beginning with the water-side.

Thaw coming on. Mr. Bucket got Jo away, by bribing Mr.
Skimpole. "No idea of money. But he
Brickmakers Takes it though."

Inn picture.

Lady Dedlock has changed clothes with Jenny-to
avoid being traced--has got her to go on, certain
miles--has herself returned to London.

Mr. Bucket's ~~excitement~~ "I have got it by the Lord!"

Chapter LVIII.

A Wintry day and night.

Carry on suspense

Impassive House in Town.

Bring Sir Leicester and George together. old youthful
feeling of Chesney Wold. "Who will tell him"

Night picture--Volumnia and maid Volumnia in room. George.
solitary house

Chapter LIX.

Esther's Narrative.

Mr. Bucket
and Mrs. Snagsby

Take up from first chapter

Allan Woodcourt.

Guster causes delay "Bring her round somehow in the Lord's name!"

"And it was my mother cold and dead."

(Nos XIX and XX--left-hand side)

Richard's death.

Vholes and Conversation Kenge at the end of
the suit.

Grandfather Smallweed and the will?

George and his brother. Betrothal day

Esther and Allan Woodcourt

of instructions

Her father. The letter George gave Mr. Tulkinghorn

Sir Leicester, in connexion with

Boythorn

Mrs. Rouncewell

Volumnia

The old girl and
the Bagnet family

Debilitated Cousin

Mr. Snagsby. No George

Mr. Guppy's handsome proposal--His mother. Tony Jobling

Jellybys and Turveydrops--Deportment

Chesney Wold picture. Sir Leicester and George. Boythorn
obliged to pretend to be still in opposition--Lady Dedlock

in the Mausoleum--without being found very
much to disturb the deceased Dedlocks.

Miss Flite and her birds Mr. Skimpole

(Nos. XIX and XX--right-hand side)

(Bleak House Nos XIX and XX.)

Chapter LX.

Perspective.

Mrs. Woodcourt and Allan. Prepare the Way.

Ada and Richard--Prepare the way. Vholes, the evil genius

Ada's secret--"The And something else upholds me Esther."

--"That he may not live to see the child

Chapter LXI. who is to doso much

A discovery

Mr. Skimpole. Life afterwards written. "Jarndyce Incarnation of selfishness."

Allan Woodcourt's declaration

Chapter LXII.

Another Discovery

Mr. Bucket and the will

Smallweed

Esther and Mr. Jarndyce

Chapter LXIII.

Steel and Iron.

George and his brother's family

His letter to Esther about the paper

Chapter LXIV

Esther's Narrative

Mistress of Bleak House

Mr. Guppy's magnanimity

Chapter LXV.

Begining the world.

Richard's death.

Chapter LXVI.

Down in Linconshire.

Mr. Boythorn--

~~Chesney Wold~~ Mausoleum

Peace.

Chapter LXVII.

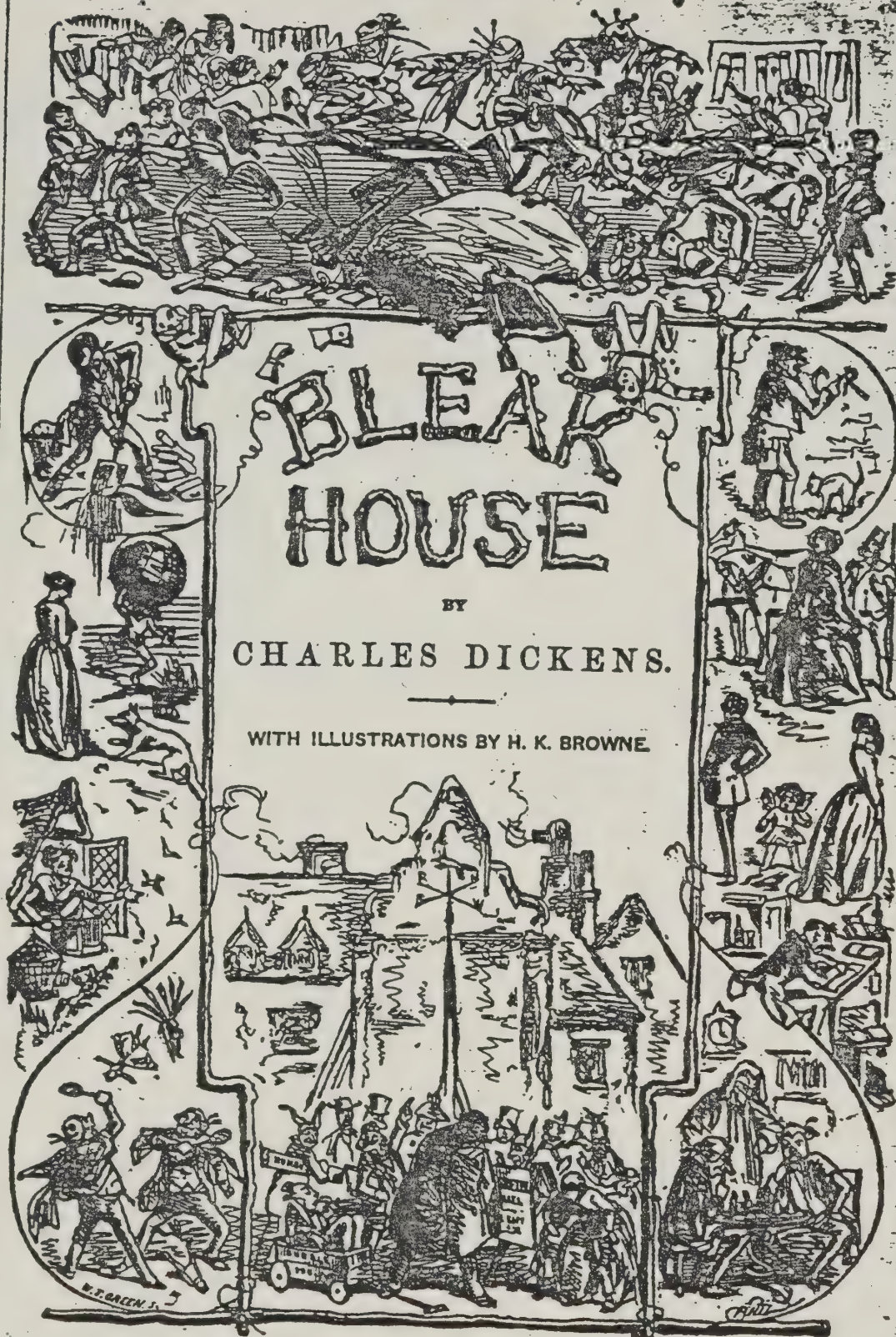
The Close of Esther's Narrative.

Wind up. End ~~(?)~~

No. XII.

FEBRUARY.

Price 1s.



LONDON: BRADBURY & EVANS, BOUVERIE STREET.

AGENTS: J. MENZIES, EDINBURGH; MURRAY AND SON, GLASGOW; J. McGLASHAN, DUBLIN.

The Author of this Work notifies that it is his intention to reserve the right of translating it.

THE BELL'S NEW WEEKLY MESSENGER.

London:

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1852.

THE DERBY ELECTION MYSTERIES.

There can be no real freedom for the people whilst the purse is allowed to have its influence over venal electors. The great remedy is the Ballot; and the circumstances to which these observations refer, go to establish the necessity for having recourse to that mode of voting at elections for members of Parliament.

MRS. JELLYDY AT STAFFORD HOUSE.

[Mrs. Jellydy has read with great emotion the details of African slavery, which Mrs. Stowe has given in her novel of "Uncle Tom." Mrs. Jellydy, whose emotions are always ready at the call of distress and sufferings at Borrioboola Gha, and other distant places, cannot conceal those emotions on the present occasion.] Mrs. Jellydy might have read equally heart-rending statements in newspapers and histories; but in that shape they have not half the effect which is produced when they are well worked up in a spicy fiction. If Mrs. Stowe had not made her piquant ragout for Mrs. Jellydy to taste, Mrs. Jellydy would not have gone to Stafford House to make her appeal, along with the Duchess of SUTHERLAND and other noble females, to the ladies of America, on behalf of suffering Africans in their States. We draw that inference at least from the fact that until Mrs. Stowe's fiction appeared, not a British lady was moved by the sufferings of slaves in America to such a demonstration as has now been made. Slavery is of course odious; and upon this point everybody in England concurs with Mrs. Jellydy. We have proved our sincerity by emancipating the slaves in our own colonies at a cost of twenty millions sterling. We, therefore, run no risk of having British humanity called in question when we say that Mrs. Jellydy and the ladies who assembled at Stafford House to remonstrate with America upon the sufferings of miserable niggers from Borrioboola-Gha and elsewhere, would have made a better use of their philanthropy and zeal if they had directed it with more discretion, and to living white slaves nearer home. "So long as American women" says Lady JANET SHUTTLEWORTH (who declined to add her name to the Jellydy manifesto), "can justly taunt the women of England with the neglect, ill-usage, and starvation payment of the lady teachers employed in their families, there is little hope of their listening to our protests on the subject of slavery. Let us reform our schoolrooms, and we may expect them to reform the cabins of their slaves." Mrs. Jellydy and her friends, the Duchesses, Marchionesses, and other ladies of rank and distinction have made their dear eyes red with weeping over the misfortunes of *Eliza*, and the sorrows of the victims of that wretch *Legree*; but have they one tear for the unemployed governess who has educated their children? Have they more than a disdainful toss of the head for the governess in their household? What wages does their benevolence afford those females? We see advertisements in the papers occasionally, for ladies of education (!), who will teach children for nothing, and be thankful for their food and lodging. There are worse sorrows within a circle of five miles round Stafford House, where the Duchess of SUTHERLAND has so feelingly expressed herself concerning the blacks, than all the *Elizas* and *Corrins* in the United States could furnish. Look round St. James's parish, and behold the milliners and their apprentices, toiling from morning till midnight, day after day, without ceasing; and in some instances, as we hear, throughout the Sunday, to provide the nation with

like to see a little redous philanthropy bestowed upon these young creatures, before it is given to black sufferers in America. In conjunction with a daily writer, we may be permitted to doubt whether American women "will be able to appreciate the satin paper and rosewater of our female aristocracy; much more, whether the *Hibbys* and *Legrees*, or even the *Shellys* and the *St. Cloirs* of the Union will take much heed of so softly-whispered a warning." The Americans are not very kindly-disposed to our aristocracy. They may rejoice, "Are you so ready to drop all distinctions of classes? Do you consent, at the bidding of any monitor, to associate with all who are your equals in education and merit? Are there no castes, no quasi negroes, creoles, mulattoes, or quadroons, in the gradations of British society. The Court Circular and the published catalogue of guests at your banquets and receptions tell another story." Those niggers working under the American lash, produce the material of the fine muslins and other articles worn by British ladies. Are the latter inclined to give up the use of such articles? All the while they are denouncing slavery they encourage it by consuming its produce. "I cannot but think, that the boundless popularity of Mrs. Stowe's romance," says the writer of a letter upon this subject, "affords a strong reason against the adoption of the proposed address at the present moment. Every one will believe and say that the address is the fruit of the novel. We shall be told that, although all the material facts of the case have been perfectly well known to us during the last 20 or 30 years, yet the women of this country gave no heed to them, and expressed no solicitude for the mitigation of this great calamity, until their feelings were excited by a tale which, powerful and eloquent as it is, is after all but the creature of the imagination of the writer." If English governesses could hire a popular author to get up a strong novel upon the subject of their sufferings, possibly the ladies who assembled at Stafford House might permit them to share their sympathies with the suffering Africans. Or if the English milliners could prevail upon some telling dramatist, BOWEN or BRACKSTONE for instance, to put the cruelties of the system to which they are victims into a melodramatic shape for the Adelphi, it is possible that the females of the British aristocracy might make an effectual movement in their behalf. [We have no objection to the extension of the sympathy of those ladies to any object; but we dislike seeing it stirred up only by tales of fiction and melo-dramatic horrors; and although we should not say a word to prevent noble ladies from riding Mrs. Jellydy's hobby, even to Borrioboola if they pleased, we must ask of their justice to take into consideration also the case of white slaves at home.]

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